

The Guerdon of Sin
and other Poems

by
E. Emery



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THE GUERDON OF SIN
AND OTHER POEMS

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AND
OTHER POEMS

By
EDWARD EMERY

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THE GUERDON OF SIN

WITHIN the bracken on the moor I lie.
Meanwhile, across the clear autumnal sky
The grey clouds chase each other constantly,
Upon the hillside casting down
Swift moving islands in a purple sea
Of heather, where the mind could drown
All thought, and the soul on wings outspread
Could travel to the portals of the dead.

Apparently at hand, yet far beneath,
Upon the margin of the holt and heath,
A village nestles in a dale, wherein
No breath of air doth stir, for see
The smoke from homesteads rises faint and thin,
Like grey wands casting silently
A spell of slumberous peace upon the dell,
And all that in its fir-crowned circle dwell.

Thus to the outward eye the landscape seems;
Above, a strange unrest—fast fleeting dreams
Wherein the elements are never still—
Below, so calm and tranquil, ne'er
Could aught of human passion, aught of ill
Obtain a moment's refuge there:
And yet withal how different is the truth;
Here all is peace, and there is sin and ruth!

Amid the village memories, this page
I found, scarce legible for dust and age;
Which first a record indistinct and blurred,
A common oft-told story seemed,
As when a far-off mountain stream is heard
To murmur; but ere long it gleamed
Blood-red, and I could hear the roar and hiss
Of cataracts in some unknown abyss.

I

He was young, she was younger, by only as much as
the blossom

Forestalleth the full ripened fruit that is ready to fall,
He was strong, and as dark as the patriarch yew of the
village,

She was white, and as slight as the moss-rose that clad
the church wall.

From a smoke-begrimed town, all ablaze with the torches
of progress,

He had come to this nest in the hills, as a shepherd of
souls,

A nature all eager for change, for reform, for do-
minion,

A being of contrasts, a warring of opposite poles.

When the primrose was hiding from March-winds, they
met in the gloaming,
Where the highway of life turns aside from her haven
of sleep;
Was it Fortune or Fate? I know not what power
ordained it,
That the fringe of her dress caught fast where the wild
briars creep.

Aye Fate, it must be, for at some such unheralded
moment,
A star draws from out the great void of the heavens
in view,
A star or a being, or both, which has passed us already,
Unnoticed perhaps, although with it Life's destiny flew.

So they met, and in meeting they lingered, the maid of
the village
Gazing up in his dark handsome face, from beside the
church stile,
He the saint-like ascetic, the leader of men and of
women,
Looking down in the eyes of a babe, with a questioning
smile.

Such the man, and the woman his making, or else his
unmaking,
The angel to raise him to heaven or cast him to hell,
A soul to reecho his laughter, his joys, or his sorrows,
His prayers, or his malisons here:—he the tongue, she
the bell.

So they stood, and I doubt not still stand in the eye of
the sunset,
Though the century then was as youthful as now it is
grey,
Grey with promises shattered and pledges for ever
abandoned,
Like toys that are scattered and broken by children at
play.

Then the life-blood ran slower, less fervid; we fancy the
world's pulse
Beats quicker and fuller for us with the march of the
years,
But I doubt not the grief-laden heart of mankind is un-
altered;
'Tis only the fashion of wearing our garment of
tears.

The limitless valley of twilight is ever before us;
Our humblest ideals as far from the grasp of the soul,
In the fierce lurid glare of the marvellous century
 dying,
Unending the milestones of progress stretch on to the
 goal.

Why weep then? or rail at the unfulfilled vaunts of the
 present,
Or worship the past for a virtue it never possessed?
They were women and men, with like longings, like
 trials and passions,
In the soul's bitter conflict oft victors, oft sinners con-
 fessed.

Let us on with our tale, let us back to the heart of the
 hamlet,
The scene is as fair, as it was on that far away eve,
The hills are unchanged, and the forest as mystic and
 sombre;
Beneath, the burn sings the same ditty without a re-
 prieve.

When the soft, winning voice of the spring in its cradle
of promise
Was cooing a tender response to the linnet's sweet phrase,
When the wee dimpled hands of the babe were in
ecstasy clapping
At the sight of each bud that Nurse Nature held up to
its gaze.

Already, ah me! she had come more than once at his
bidding,
As oft as the moon has her phases and moods in
the skies,
Like the moon's silver bowl floating onward, reluctant
yet willing,
Drawn on by a current unseen, through a heaven of sighs:

To drink at the mystical fountain of sunshine and
shadow,
That bright crystal spring flowing often with warm
balmy breath,
Pouring out of the cold marble lips of a mask, which
resembles
The pitiless features of him whom we welcome as Death.

Thus she came, when the long days of labour at even
were ended,
With the scent of the meadows still fresh in her rich
auburn hair,
Like a naiad, bare-footed across the swift rivulet tripping,
To weave for her soul, from her tresses of beauty, a
snare.

Blame her not: on how many an eve had she listened
with wonder
In the dimly lit church to the magical charm of his speech;
As he towered upraised by the fervour of passionate
feeling,
He seemed scarcely human—a spirit no mortal could
reach.

By the bole of the giant red cedar, the king of the forest,
Standing lone and immense in the heart of the neigh-
bouring glade,
As often as he could steal forth, unobserved, in the
twilight,
They sat and conversed 'neath the boughs of the monarch
of shade.

Here they lingered, or wandered beyond in the depth
of the forest,
Where lay a dark tarn, mid the cedars and fir-trees apart;
Here he showed her the mind of a poet, the myths of a
dreamer;
Here she read him an unopened volume, her innocent
heart.

So the spring grew to summer; that one joyous bubble
that sparkles
And trembles a second or two on the rim of our glass,
That bright, golden moment that man, be he ever so
weary,
Looks forward to quaffing with ecstasy, ere he must pass

Into silence: they drink it together, the man and the
maiden;
Let us see when the winecup hereafter shall fall from
their hands,
What drops will be spilt on the great Mother Earth,
whether roses,
Or briars will spring from their love and inherit the
lands.

II

Tis the moon of the harvest, majestic in silence arising,
Unveiling her blush in the crystalline air to our sight,
From the underworld soaring, a goddess rejoicing to
 wander
In search of Endymion asleep in the arms of the night.

For one little moment she pushes the rushes asunder
To glance in a pool 'neath whose mirror the dreaming
 burn flows,
Then supreme in her loveliness, higher and higher
 ascending,
She floats through the heavens as white as the virginal
 snows.

Hist, a sound! Surely something stirred yonder? The
 breeze in the thicket?
Nay, for certain a withered branch cracked 'neath the
 harsh tread of man;

The owl that flew by with a hoot from its vigil was
startled;
Like a shadow across the dim pathway a pine-marten ran.

Yes a man it is doubtless, or is it some half-human being
Whose day is our night-time? a ghoul who doth search
for his prey?
Or a satyr in quest of a nymph? or a fugitive dryad?
Or a shepherd who looks for the sheep that has wandered
astray?

As he nears the lone cedar, a figure glides out of its
shadow,
Stops short, then emboldened advances as wan as the
moon—
Like a note, that an instant 'tween discord and melody
trembles,
Then fades into harmony, all its sweet being atune—

So she sinks on his breast, in his smile the dark past
for a moment
Has vanished, the oft dreaded future she still can post-
pone,

Like the lotus reclining on life's eager tide, she is conscious

Of the absolute bliss of this halcyon moment alone.

Grudge her not this brief dream of delight, 'twill be over so quickly,

She has waited so long, she has trembled for all, and for nought!

Would he come? If he did, would she dare still to whisper the secret

She had hid from herself, though her life with its being was fraught?

Let her dream yet once more, ere she wakens for ever and ever,

To smile with insanity's eyes in oblivion's abyss,

Let her walk, hand in hand, with her dream to the end of the vista

Ere she wakens to find what a world of injustice is this!

What a world of evasion, hypocrisy, cant, and deception,

Is often this vaunted, yet pitiful planet of ours,

Where the soil that is easiest delved and the fairest of
promise
Bears thorns in the place of the much needed spring-tide
of flowers!

On they move from beside the great tree—these strange
phantoms, conversing
Adown the dark glade to the marge of the now shining
mere;
For an instant it seemed that the cedar was moving
beside them,—
—'Twas only its shadow that grew as the moonlight shone
clear.

Now they halt at the tarn where the light in the sedges
is faintest,
Sit them down, side by side, gazing out o'er the bright
silent waste;
On his shoulders the wealth of her tresses has fallen
unnoticed,
Round her fair nestling figure his arm is unconsciously
placed.

Thus they motionless sit, like a group carved by nature
in silver,
Till at length one imagines they never could alter their
pose.
Yet behold, all is changed! She is kneeling before him
in anguish,
Her passionate fingers his cold listless fingers enclose.

Has she told him her secret? It must be—for see, he has
risen
Irresolute, while she doth plead with a fervour intense,
In return for the sacrifice she, in her love, has accom-
plished,
That he openly share, in the eyes of the world, their
offence.

Oh! man born of woman, 'tis asking too much to
expect thee
To honour what thou hast dishonoured, though she may
become
The mother of one whose bright honour may plead thy
forgiveness,
When before the Great Judgement thou standest awe-
stricken and dumb.

Long and deep is the conflict, the struggle is fierce and
forbidding.

Which will triumph? The angel of Death or of Life?

Who can say?

His hand he has freed, and has spoken his last word!

'Tis over!

She has fallen, a heap, 'mid the reeds—he has stolen away!

Not a sound! Yet I fancied the rushes stirred slowly and
feebly,

As though someone moved, not in haste, to the edge of
the mere,

Like a bird that, entranced by the eye of a serpent, doth
flutter

Still nearer and nearer destruction, unconscious of fear.

Get thee back, selfish heart! while there still is a chance
of forgiveness,

Thou may'st yet be redeemed, and a spirit be ransomed
from woe:....

What was that? A low splash! She is gone! Surely back
to the village?

'Twas never her fair form that made those dark ripples
to flow?

How sombre the glen! In the moonlight the fir trees'
dim outlines

Stretch over the tarn lying chilly and still in its bed;
On its unruffled surface their shadows are passing un-
heeded,

Like ghosts of sad memories over a face that is dead.

Not a sound stirs the glade: 'tis as though the dark
forest were holding

In awe its deep breath, at the scene which before it has
passed;

The lone sylvan monarch now towers more gloomy than
ever;

Behind angry clouds, in the welkin, the moon flies aghast!

III

Years have dowered the cedar with twenty fresh girdles
of vigour
The world has moved on, yet the hamlet has slumbered
meanwhile;
The villagers further have fared in life's march, yet their
customs
Are all as unchanged as the landscape for many a mile.

On the church wall the moss-rose still buds in the sun-
shine of summer;
Within, the dark aisles are as gloomy and grim as of old,
From the pulpit the same voice is heard, though the
features are altered,
And the pastor's dark locks are as white as the snow on
the wold.

He has stayed for long years in this quaint inglenook
of tradition,
Looking out on the world through its little green dia-
mond panes,

Gazing out on the slow-changing features of nature, un-
mindful
Of all the great projects, the world in its progress contains.

Can it be, he has clung to this cluster of moss-covered
dwellings,
Rapt in placid repose midst the swift moving eddies
of Time,
Unable to tear himself free from the dread fascination
The miscreant feels in still haunting the scene of his
crime?

Let that be as it may, he is worshipped by all in the
hamlet,
In his orchard the rosy-lipped laughter of children is
heard,
At his coming the hearts of the weary and desolate
quicken,
One only against his sincerity flings an ill word.

One only—and he the old woodman, the dolt of the
parish,
Who found a white moss-rose asleep 'mong the pond-
lilies laid,

He alone of the villagers harbours suspicions, and
whispers

How once in the forest he chanced on the priest and
the maid.

What is more, he has said that the pastor at all times
avoids him,

That he shrinks from his eye, even when he is reading
the prayers.

These are nothing but fancies, wild babbling delusions
and frenzies,

That follow this half-witted creature wherever he fares.

This morning, unheeded as ever, the dotard hath muttered,
Lying close unto death—"There's a warning today in
the breeze,

Before nightfall a tempest, the like of which no one
remembers,

Will burst in its fury, uprooting the great forest trees."

His eye and stern features aglow with a strange light
prophetic,

Upraised on his couch he exclaimed:—"Yea, the death-
call is nigh,

His and mine! Bid the pastor come hither and hear from
the woodman

His past, ere the horrified dawn shudders up through
the sky."

No one heeds. In the forest the shuttles of sunshine and
shadow

Such tapestries weave as the autumn alone can design;
On the dark leafy curtains the breeze of the morning
embroiders

Strange musical numbers, with evergreen needles of pine.

Thus the forenoon slips by, growing slowly more ashen
and hoary,

As the gathering clouds stretch their shrouds o'er the
face of the land;

Through the points of the compass the wind hath
returned, till at even

A stillness of death forebodes evil: a storm is at hand.

O'er the lately ploughed stretch of the uplands the curlew
is calling,

Wild and sad is his cry like the wail of a being in pain,

Like the voice of a spirit who plucked but the flowers
of passion,
And found that his fingers hath clutched at life's object
in vain.

From his oriel window the pastor is fixedly gazing
Straight out at the wild, angry sunset in haste to depart,
Still unable to muster up courage to visit the dying.
Afraid lest the dark veil of silence be torn from his heart.

Yet more lurid it grows, as the fierce sun in anguish
descendeth
Like a spirit in flames to the nether abode of lost souls:
Crisp, and clear like a tocsin to fly from disaster im-
pending,
Afar from the ivy-clad tower the vesper bell tolls.

Hist! A sigh from afar, then a stillness more awesome
than ever;
Again, a low moan, like the waking of one who despairs;
Then a silence as breathless and deep as the deepest of
thunder
Once more—listen! the querulous wrath of wild beasts
in their lairs.

Beneath, in the underworld caged, 'gainst the red bars
of sunset
The spirits that glory in ruin are tossing their manes,
Pacing backward and forward, impatiently waiting the
moment,
Their blind keeper, Fate, for their freedom from bondage
ordains.

It has come! With a roar the wild trolls of the whirlwind
dart forward,
With a shriek of delight, and the laughter of fiends, they
are free!
Beneath them the breasts of the earth strangely quiver,
and shiver,
Before them the clouds like the scud of the wild surges
flee.

In sheer ecstasy writhing the storm-fiends whirl onward,
extending
Their arms of destruction aloft in the gathering gloom,
Supreme in their absolute frenzy for riot and havoc,
Sublime in their infinite love for their mission of
doom.

Through the dark locks of wind, their lean fingers of
anguish coil snake-like,
Through their passionate throats float the echoes of
voices in hell:
In their hearts there is neither a God of salvation nor
mercy,—
Small hope for the mortal belated on moorland or fell!

Night has come. Every instant still louder and louder,
more deafening
Grow the cries of the wind and the crash of the trees
in the blast;
Now the din has increased till the ear almost fancies
that silence
Has sprung from the bedlam of sound that is hurrying past.

In his study the pastor remains, with his hands clasped
before him,
With a haunted and desperate look in his yet youthful
eyes:
He can never be dreaming of seeking the woodman till
morning?
In the hurricane's fury his pardon assuredly lies.

Yet he rises at length, as though drawn by a current
magnetic,
Halts, and listens, in hopes that the whirlwind will lessen
anon,
Then clutching his cloak, swiftly lifting the latch, in the
tempest
He struggles an instant, and then in the darkness is gone.

He is gone, by an oft-trodden path to the hut of the
woodman,
Passing close to the giant red cedar, the king of the
glade;
He is gone, not to hear the confession of one that is
dying,
But to make a confession of crime, such as few lips
have made.

Hark! A sinister crash! Even over the bellowing storm-
winds
It sounded; a thunder-bolt fell, one would think, from
the skies.
Small wonder! the cedar, the pride of the forest is stricken.
Beneath it, the unshriven heart of the sinful priest lies.

Unrevealed its black secret—for so hath the forest-king
willed it,
'Tis his vengeance for all that occurred 'neath his
branches of gloom;
For he thought in his immature soul, that the dead could
no longer
Importune the great God for forgiveness, when laid in
the tomb.

Oh! crime, born of crime, yet once more thou hast
triumphed, art victor,
A being is thine to deface, to deform as thou wilt,
It is thine by the law that here evil shall live upon evil,
It is thine for as long as its soul is still conscious of guilt.

There's a lull in the tempest, as if even Nature were
startled,
Were spell-bound with dread at a sentence that knoweth
no grace;
In the gloom, through the heavens a star from its glory
is falling,
Through the fathomless gulfs and abysmal recesses of
space.

A soul with its guerdon of sin, the false shepherd's
proud spirit,
In the silence it flies past the scintillant splendour
of suns,
In the darkness supreme of the uttermost void speeding
ever,
Till it rests on a globe that each orb in the firmament
shuns.

In a land where the night-tides of silence, with monotone
measure,
Beat deep on the wind-bereft crags of a desolate shore,
'Neath a stagnant incarnadine sky that revengefully
lowers
O'er a world that the kisses of slumber shall visit no
more;

In this star, where the desolate outcasts of Eden are
gathered,
Down infinite valleys of cypress in haste it doth fare,
Attended by shadows that whisper of pleasure Elysian,
To acclaim the veiled figure that sits on the throne of
Despair.

How long? Oh! how long shall the spirits of sorrow
here worship?

How long? Oh! how long shall they drain this fierce
chalice of woe?

Be assured that the Maker their fetters of anguish will
loosen,

When the ransoming tears of repentance unsparingly flow.

Be ye certain that mercy alone hath dominion eternal,
Be convinced that the glory of heaven each soul yet
shall scan,

For the judgement of God the All Father, that made us
his children,

Is surely more clement and just than the judgement of
man.

THE RUINED CASTLE

ROUND the watchless keep the wild falcon calls,
The ivy along the mouldering walls
Waves shuddering through the roofless halls,
 Singing in vain,
 Its sad refrain.
 Whispering low
 A tale of woe,
Of love and its undoing, . . .
 . . . Or is it the fitful groan,
 And moan,
Of the tempest brewing?

Hark! The broken bell in the chapel sings,
Though round its lips the lichen clings,
Or is it the screech-owl's hoot that rings,
 Like a spirit's knell,
 From the dungeon cell?

While round about,
A wizard rout
The withered leaves are strewing, . . .
. . . Or is it the ebbing breath
Of Death,
In the tempest brewing?

Beneath the shade of the riven tower,
No roses bloom in my lady's bower,
Where the shattered dial mistakes the hour.
It seemed just now
Upon my brow
Fell piteous tears
From other spheres,
My upturned face bedewing, . . .
. . . Or was it the flying flood
And scud,
From the tempest brewing?

Down the broken stairs I hear the tread
Of unknown feet—or was it instead,
The rats' high revel overhead?
Now through the gloom
Float words of doom,

As at my side
The door opes wide,
My ghostly fears renewing, ...
... Or was it the rising stress,
And press,
Of the tempest brewing?

Between the ruined arches there,
I caught a glint of golden hair!
Or was it the setting sun's last flare?
It seemed in truth
A maid and youth
This instant through
The chamber flew,
Grim fear their steps pursuing! ...
... Or was it the cloud's dark shade,
Afraid
Of the tempest brewing?

Across the court the lovers fly,
And halt, as at the gate they spy
Their foes. I surely heard their cry!
One kiss, one more,
And all is o'er.

The wind again?
Nay, see this stain
Of blood the stones imbuing.
God grant these walls may be swept away
For aye
By the tempest brewing!

THE PALACE OF VAIN DESIRES

AMID the clouds a palace stands,
Deep bosomed in the fiery West,
Beneath it stretch unhallowed lands
Where none may rest.

Upon its towers and turrets stream
The blood-red rays of the setting sun.
When on the earth the shadows teem,
And day is done.

Beneath its walls a garden lies,
Rich with the breath of strange perfumes,
Each odour, pregnant with deep sighs,
The soul consumes.

Amid this mead of blossoms fare
Old forms that long this earth have fled,
The elder gods whose creeds grew bare,
And now are dead.

Pan, wailing through deserted fanes,
Like one who lives and yet would die,
Upon his reedy flute complains
 To earth and sky.

The queen whose smile the world ensnared,
Here for her lost Adonis grieves;
Upon her breasts—for kisses bared—
 Fall withered leaves.

Within deep cypress groves are heard
Sad murmuring rivulets, that rise
Where Eos, ever hope-deferred,
 For Memnon cries.

Sweet Echo's voice, entreating, strays
From rock to rock, through winding dell,
Essaying in a thousand ways
 Her woes to tell.

Great Jove—a second Saturn now—
Upon a rocky eminence,
To heaven bemoans with cloudy brow
 His impotence.

Here fauns for ever breathless chase
Fair nymphs, who, turning as they flee,
Back in each panting, ardent face
Laugh mockingly.

While naiads from some chilly mere
Arising with their hearts aglow,
For lovers' faces vainly peer
In depths below.

Here selfish prayers of mundane souls,
Beside earth's former rulers pass,
With tarnished golden aureoles,
And feet of brass.

All in these realms from joy withdrawn,
Yearn eastward with a hope intense,
Yet their sad eyes behold no dawn
For recompense.

When o'er the sombre mountain's crests
In silence floats the moon's pale sphere,
And through the gloom steal spectral guests,
With eyes of fear.

Then from the frowning palace dome,
Wild clarion notes upon the breeze
Call man's accursed desires home
 On bended knees.

Up, up the marble steps they toil,
A ghastly, motley, glittering throng,
Like some huge python's shining coil,
 Gliding along.

Until the palace court they gain,
Where through an archway yawning wide,
They view the hideous torch-lit fane
 Of earthly pride.

Chanting a fierce unhallowed prayer,
Prostrate they cast their false hearts down,
Demanding each, as their just share,
 A golden crown.

Then mad with hope deferred, they seize
The altar's glowing brands, and fire
Their temple, seeking to appease
 Each vain desire.

Down, down the gulf with torch ablaze,
Like lava torrents, headlong pour
These phantoms, till the night betrays
 Their path no more.

With brands inverted to the sods,
'Mid mocking taunts they hurry on,
Scorned by the wan Olympian gods
 In unison.

Till o'er the void of Sleep's dark brink,
Amid a treacherous Land of Dreams.
They lean, and rapturously drink
 Its lethal streams.

Upon this region of dismay,
This threshold to the gates of Sin,
Pray that our souls gaze not, lest they
 Be chained therein.

TO M...

AMID the kingdom of our art
 We wandered,
Full many a happy hour therein
 We squandered;
Embowered in flowers,
 The happy hours
 Sped musically,
 Fantastically,
 Each day
 Away,
Without one note of melancholy,
For we were bent on searching solely
For buds and blossoms pure and holy,
 That grew on either hand,
 In our enchanted land.

Yet ere we bade farewell,
A gracious thing befell;

To my surprise.

I heard the carol of the birds no more,
Upon the flowery scents I set no store,
I heeded not the wonder-laden skies;
For all the glories of the world around
My gaze had found
Deep nestled in your eyes.

PERADVENTURE

THE wind that dies in silence as we listen,
Will it not crown with life some other spot?
The light that yields reluctant to the darkness,
Will it not shine on fields where we are not?

The wave that breaks unheeded on the foreland,
Hath it no other mission in the main?
The voice beloved that spake, and now is silent,
Will it ne'er whisper in our ear again?

The life that ceases in the act of reaping,
Will it not claim elsewhere what it hath sown?
The past with all its wealth of joys half gathered,
Where has the breath of Death these blossoms blown?

The future with its ever-open portals,
Revealing realms we never may possess.
The myriad limitations of our being,
That chain the soul in desolate duress:

This scanty life of incomplete sensations,
That came unsought from out the vast unseen,
The purpose of this world wherein we suffer,—
Why lies the truth behind the eternal screen?

In this revolving planet of our labours,
May it not be each mortal's task to trim
The lamp which burns before the shrine of sorrow,
That so its heavenward flame may ne'er grow dim?

May it not be this star alone is destined
The anchorage of doubting souls to be,
Among the other harbour-lights that glimmer
Across the ocean of infinity?

SHE HEEDETH NOT

THE grey clouds weep,
Above that spot,
Sweet tears, that through the green sward creep
And pierce their way into the deep
And narrow vault where she doth sleep:
And still she heedeth not.

The sun's rays shed,
Upon that spot,
The livelong day a golden thread
Of life, and o'er her tranquil bed
A coverlet of flowers have spread;
And still she heedeth not.

The elm trees grow
Around that spot
And through their feathery branches blow
The breezes, murmuring soft and low
The sweetest lullaby they know;
And still she heedeth not.

The lilies bloom
Within that spot,
And seem to feel their share of doom,
Shedding white petals round her tomb,
Filling the air with sad perfume;
And still she heedeth not.

The nightingale,
Hard by that spot,
Oft sings, when lingering shadows veil
The tranquil features of the dale,
As if his soul he would exhale;
And still she heedeth not.

Yet I have thought
That when, ah me!
Some phantasy, with evil fraught,
Hath entered my weak soul, and brought
My best resolves to all but nought;
She moved uneasily.

DOUBT

○ FATAL germ of man's first tribulation!
Wherein the question of this world doth lie,
The cloud no bigger than a hand, which sorrow
Hath gathered on the confines of our sky.

Slight as the fitful gust that bodes the tempest,
Feeble as pipe of fledgelings scarcely free,
Yet vast as life, and as the dim to-morrow,
Burdened with all the miseries to be.

Fraught with the fate of every living creature,
Barren with hope, and pregnant with despair,
O Shade! whose kiss of death hath bred and nourished
The fiercest ills to which mankind is heir:

Pale lips, foam-flecked with frozen breath of others,
Blood-stained where fervid lips have kissed and died,
Like rose leaves shrivelled at the touch of winter,
How can your abject thralldom be denied?

Within this twilight land of deepening shadows,
Where one by one our hopes have waned and set,
Like stars within a dreary waste of waters,
That surge beneath the storm-winds of regret,

How find the strength of heart to face undaunted
The tearless unrelenting eyes of fate,
And view therein the gleaming hosts of spirits
For ever rising towards their higher state?

How seek the light of peace that shall illumine
The sibylline inscriptions on life's scroll?
From out this tangled skein of joys and sorrows
How weave a creed to satisfy the soul?

How gain the power sublime that can unfetter
The heart of man from Doubt's daedalian snare?
How recognise the Living God's existence
Half-hidden, half-revealèd, everywhere?

By Faith! that from the shrine of prayer arising,
Across Death's dark abyss undaunted soars,
While on the brink the doubting mind halts hearing
The knell of billows on oblivion's shores.

Above the hollow wail of these wild waters,
A still small voice steals through th'encircling gloom,
Bidding the troubled heart arise and clamber
Starward, from out its hideous living tomb.

On Faith's prophetic voice alone relying,
'Mid blinding mists, we grope our weary way
Towards the sov'reign heights where we shall welcome
The first faint glimmer of the coming day.

Behold, the East is all aflame with splendour,
Before our eager eyes fast spreads the dawn,
And with the flying clouds of doubt beneath us,
The Sphinx's outline fadeth and is gone!

THE LOVER'S CHOICE

I must hear the weir's wild music,
Rejoicing where we met,
Where my heart first sang Love's paeon,
A song it is singing yet.

I must where our troth was plighted,
And there at peace recline,
Last night thy voice it silenced,
To night it slayeth mine.

CASTLE DANGEROUS

NO beach is there; the cold, clear air
Is cut by the headland lying bare.
On that granite block the fierce seas knock,
While fiends beneath in their caverns mock
The water's tireless, deathless shock.

The boldest shrink from the dizzy brink,
Where eddying whirlpools seethe, and sink;
And yet from the edge of the highest ledge,
A tower stands forth as a solemn pledge
Of some incarnate sacrilege.

From out its soul a bell doth toll,
Swinging aloft of its own control,
The hollow note from its parchèd throat
O'er yawning abysses seems to gloat,
As it drinks the airs that seaward float.

All round that tower the night-winds cower,
Bound by the same unearthly power,
While o'er the land the flaming hand
Has stretched its gleaming, withering brand,
Unsheathed at the thunder's stern command.

Beneath the verge the swinging surge
Ceaselessly chants a funeral dirge,
For no prayer avails the bark that sails
Too close to the wrack of the ruthless gales,
Where the dread maelstrom of Self prevails.

Its own death giver, no sigh or shiver
For deeds that are done, can its soul deliver;
A wild outcast it stands, bound fast
To the dark steep brow of the ghostly past,
As long as this earth and sky shall last.

JOY AND SORROW

I'VE often, often wondered
In which star joy was born,
And whether sorrow's coming
Was on the selfsame morn.

I know I ne'er may fathom
This mystery divine,
And yet I pray that some day
This destiny be mine: —

That when joy has departed
From my reluctant breast,
He'll leave it swept and garnished
For life's unbidden guest;

And when grief leaves my bosom,
And joy reigns in its place,
May I his presence welcome
With truer praise and grace.

Thus may my heart be certain,
Ere silenced 'neath the sod,
That both were born in heaven,
And both are sons of God.

SCENES FROM QUEEN ETHELIND

ACT THE SECOND

SCENE I.

The park of the Castle of Mortalin. Afar in the background to the left, upon a rocky eminence, the castle. To the right, forest-clad hills through which a torrent pours, crossed by a rustic bridge that joins the park to the winding path leading to the forest and to the castle. In the centre a spreading oak with a raised dais for the KING and QUEEN. To the left a path leading to a chapel, the spire of which is visible amid the trees—the chapel bell, from time to time, is heard to toll. It is late in the afternoon, and the snow-clad peaks of the Sierras are glittering in the setting sun.

MARGENTIS, the Court Magician, enters from the right carrying his wand—looking round.

MARGENTIS.

This is the spot his royal Highness chose.

(He seats himself upon a fallen tree and begins drawing cabalistic signs on the ground. Suddenly a huge MOOR springs out from the wood on the left and stands before him.)

MOOR.

You called upon a spirit—he is here!

D*

MARGENTIS (*starting up*).

Mahmoud Ben Islam! Whence art thou? Begone
Such rashness will play havoc with our hopes.
Here even now the cousin of the King
Is due.

MAHMOUD.

I passed, unseen, close to the castle
A limping infidel, with book in hand.
If 'tis for him thou waitest we have time
To spare.

MARGENTIS.

What tidings?

MAHMOUD.

Bright and glorious news.
The Caliph and his host besiege the King
Of France, but this is but a crafty ruse
To draw your grey-beard monarch to his rescue
And let the true believer's arm lay waste
This land unchallenged.

MARGENTIS.

Skilfully devised!

MAHMOUD.

Outstripping the breathless knight that brings the news
Of our fell foray into France, I've raced,
To tell thee that the guiding stars must warn
King Elver 'gainst the pass of Regismont,
Thus leaving it unbarred for our dread Lord
Who is resolved to seize the Queen, and place
Her world-famed loveliness in his seraglio.

(MARGENTIS makes a movement of surprise and displeasure.)

MARGENTIS.

How didst thou chance upon me?

MAHMOUD.

Zeyn the dwarf

Bade me come here.

MARGENTIS.

The sight of a true believer
Untied his tongue for to these infidels
He's deaf and dumb!

(MAHMOUD and MARGENTIS laugh sotto voce.)

MARGENTIS.

My cautious nature dreads,
Lest we may be surprised—like limping Time
This prince of devils travels faster than
One thinks—let us converse amid the trees.

(They disappear to the left. As they do so the DWARF steals from behind a rock, he is about to follow them when he perceives SIR CONRAD descending towards the rock, and he retreats to his former hiding place.)

SCENE II.

(A moment later SIR CONRAD enters from the left by path leading from the castle.)

SIR CONRAD.

I'm first upon the scene—until he comes
I'll read.....

(He opens the scroll he is carrying and seating himself under the oak begins to read. After a few minutes he looks up and casts pebbles idly into the torrent.)

Like these stray pebbles fall we, one by one,
Within Fate's roaring torrent, and are swept
Ruthless away to hidden destinies.....

Perchance this Moorish scribe dreamed truthfully,
That every human will returns once more
As fuel to sustain the energy
Of nature, while our fleshly forms dissolve
To weave again the fairy garb of Earth,
Which like a robe, becoming overworn
And threadbare in the course of time, shall pass
Through its own dissolution to reform,
From out the scattered atoms, worlds as yet
Unborn. Such doctrines fit my empty cap!

*(Enter MARGENTIS from the right. SIR CONRAD
closes the scroll and rises to meet him.)*

MARGENTIS.

Your Royal Highness has a fitting spot
Selected for our meeting. Solitude
Is handmaid to our wishes.

(giving to SIR CONRAD a small phial.)

Until dawn
I communed with the future-laden stars,
And they did bid immediate action—Here
Is what will aid us more than armed men.

*(SIR CONRAD places the phial quickly in his
doublet, as he does so the DWARF peeps from
behind the trees.)*

MARGENTIS.

This phial's ruby poison stains like blood.

(giving SIR CONRAD a scarf.)

On this stolen kerchief of the Queen but pour
The red stream, and present it to the King
Upon a salver, chased with ghastly fears,
And cruel doubts for his sweet consort's safety,
Declaring it was found amid the woods,
To his impassioned lips he'll press the token,
And die.

SIR CONRAD.

Now are we of one mind and heart,
Bound by the lasting tie of common ends
To join our means, that these bright dreams may take
A form substantial to the human touch.

MARGENTIS.

This very eve King Elver's soul must quit
The earth.

SIR CONRAD.

Not so, we must wait till his Queen
Has fled the Court with Lionel. Once gone,
Upon them we can cast our daring deeds.
To-morrow at the banquet Elver dies,
But not before.

MARGENTIS.

Your Highness, is it safe
To let her Majesty escape from hence?
Around her, should she not return, will rise
A host of stalwart followers who will bid
Defiance to your rule. 'Twere best to entice
Her to my lonely tower, and mew her up
Mid voiceless walls.

SIR CONRAD.

The archers of Sir Bors
Are ambushed in the mountains and will spurn
Sir Lionel from off our path. This done,
They'll bring the bird of paradise safe-caged
To thee.

MARGENTIS.

When in the crystal sphere I gazed
No cloud hung o'er our hopes, but when I watched
The beryl stone, a hazy veil obscured
Its heart. Someone will seek to play us false,
But woe to him! We are forewarned, and nought
Shall intervene between us and our spoils.
For thee this land, for me its fairest face.

(Hunting horns are heard in the distance.)

SIR CONRAD.

Hark! That is the King returning from the chase—
Away!

MARGENTIS.

I go, and shall perform my task
Of watching o'er our starry destinies,
Upon the hansom that when thou hast grasped
This kingdom, I shall claim its sweetest flower
To grace the splendour of a magic throne,
Amid the fairy islands of the west.

(Exit MARGENTIS towards the castle.)

SIR CONRAD.

When I have won my game of chess with Fate
I'll sweep this pawn from off the board of life.
Ne'er shall this renegade impostor bear
My fair and wayward cousin to his home,
A squalid hovel in his native land,
The dim, mysterious, lying Orient.
I bless my natal star, the lurid Mars,
That nature gave me no accomplishments
Wherewith to draw her violet eyes divine
Upon my path, else might I too have knelt
Beneath her spell, and left my bones to rot

Within this mermaid's cave. What was that sound?

(He looks anxiously around.)

'Tis nought, I am alone, and can unsheath
From out the scabbard of my silent heart
The dagger of my hate, to which fair chance
Shall fit ere long the handle of resolve.

(Taking the phial from his doublet and gazing at it.)

This is the sure resolvent of all doubts,
The only true expounder of the dream
That cheats from cradle to the grave mankind—
For are we all but dreamers, nothing more,
Who sit and spin bright cobwebs in the sun.
Most spider-like return we to our task
With such persistence, that if we displayed
The same in things of realistic mould,
'Twould place the victor's wreath upon our brow.
O Life! what strange unreasoning charm is thine
That we are deaf to all the creaking sounds
Chanting the progress of our earthly toil,
As from Time's never-failing well we draw,
Like weary Persian wheels with spendthrift waste,
The halting current of our human aims.
Up from this lotus-bowered couch of dreams!
With the eager grasp of action I must pluck
The ample sleeve of opportunity,

And whisper in her wayward ear—my bidding!
Yet stay; an unknown feeling bids me pause
Ere I command these puny souls to sink
Down, down the fear-beridden gulf from whence
No whisper of the echoing foot-falls hint
Whither the armies of the dead stride on.
Vain doubts! To those whom nature crowns with thought
Great good or evil comes with equal grace:
The man with full capacity endowed
May never rest self-satisfied, serene,
With meed of mediocrity's attain.
So was it with myself. The perilous path
That storms Hope's citadel I chose,
Short shrift to him who bars the narrow way!
The void for Elver.....and for me the crown!.....

(The DWARF moves cautiously away.)

What was that sound? Someone is here concealed,
Unless my ear more timid than my heart
Deceives me.

(Perceiving the DWARF he makes a hurried step towards him. As he does so the DWARF seeing that he is discovered, comes towards SIR CONRAD and makes a low reverence, and then never taking his eyes off SIR CONRAD's hand which is playing with his dagger, slowly exits bowing.)

Who knows if he did see Margentis' gift,
Or if he did that he did grasp its purpose? Pshaw!
Should he its import guess, he cannot, deaf
And dumb as sure he is—disclose our plot.
Yet for security, I'll see he sleeps
A sleep to-night from which he wakes no more.

SCENE III.

(The hunting horns are again heard close at hand. SIR CONRAD re-opens his scroll and pretends to be engrossed therein while the hunters descend from the hills to the right. KING ELVER, SIR LIONEL, SIR BORS, SIR HUGO, SIR BERTRAM with other KNIGHTS and HUNSMEN, the latter carrying a wild boar, are seen descending from the hills on the right. The KING and KNIGHTS are armed with spears.)

CHORUS.

Hail! to the hunting horn,
Which in the dewy morn,
Through the deep forest borne
In joyous numbers,
Soars on the breeze's wings
From rock to rock it rings,
Rousing the woodland kings
From peaceful slumbers.

Hail! to the huntsman bold,
Whom countless dawns behold
On the lone wintry wold
Seeking his pleasure.
Where roaring torrents leap,
Far from the castle's keep,
High on the mountain steep,
Finds he life's treasure.

Deep in some lonesome glen,
Braves he the bear's dark den,
Or in the marshy fen,
Tracketh his quarry.
Loud calls the bugle blast,
Fierce hounds are swiftly cast,
And with delight at last,
Ends the wild foray.

KING ELVER (*to* SIR CONRAD).

Good morrow cousin mine, always engrossed
In recondite and weighty mysteries?
The chase is idle sport for studious minds,
Still, had this morn but seen thee in our hunt
Of quick excitement and its brother, strife,
Which stirs the currents of our noble blood,

Thou wouldst have quaffed a brimming draught. Was't not
So Lionel?

SIR LIONEL.

Excitement and to boot
Had I my liege; for had thy friendly spear
Not met, and rendered impotent the charge
Of this

(pointing to the dead boar.)

Fierce guardian of the silent woods,
When my foot slipped upon the mossy ground,
A Mass might now be said for my repose

SIR CONRAD.

You know most gallant Elver, that of old
The careful study of some ancient writ
Whose pages tell of scenes long past and gone,
Where I can read the language of the heart,
Without the pain which always must attend
Upon life's field of action, does attract
Me most. The doings of my noble king,
His fears, his aspirations, and his hopes
Are dear; but all that others most betides
Falls on my ear as deafly as a tale
Of gossip at the Court.

KING ELVER.

To all is known
Thy tried affection to myself and realm.
Hast seen perchance this morn our gracious Lady?

SIR CONRAD.

Her maids I met beside the postern gate,
And from their bearing they did but await
Their mistress ere they ventured forth. And see,
Fair as the huntress Dian she descends
To crown with smiles the victors of the chase.

SCENE IV.

(The QUEEN and LADIES carrying garlands enter, followed by the King's DWARF. The KING advances to meet the QUEEN. As the KING does so, SIR CONRAD and SIR BORS remain behind in conversation.)

SIR CONRAD.

Who knows no better way to shield his honour
Than to assist the man who slurs it most,
Hath scant equipment for the kingly task
O shielding others. Lionel to-night
Will bear the Queen from hence—Art thou prepared
To snatch from him his prize?

SIR BORS.

Fear not! Ere dawn

My archers shall let loose their angry shafts,
And through a score or more of gaping wounds,
Affrighted at its ghastly tenement,
His false soul from its worthless body flies.
This righteous deed accomplished, I will bear
This goddess to my mountain fastness, whence
The hand of Death alone shall set her free.

*(SIR CONRAD and SIR BORS make way for the
KING and QUEEN. Both bow obsequiously.)*

KING ELVER

(coming forward with the QUEEN.)

Sweet mistress mine thy presence hath a charm
That from no source terrestrial springs, to lead
Me to a nobler self.

QUEEN ETHELIND.

Would that thy words
Had substance for their happy life beyond
The pasture of thy generous mind, that sees
In others but thy better self. Pray tell
Me of the chase, no harm to thee befell

I trust, for to my fancy thou didst seem
In peril, when this morn my rosary
I told.

KING ELVER.

No danger worthy of thy care
Befell.

SIR CONRAD.

Nought—save that brave Sir Lionel
Is debtor for life's breath unto the King.

QUEEN ETHELIND (*greatly excited*).

What! thou my friend, in danger?

SIR LIONEL.

Even so,
Unto his Majesty I owe my life.

KING ELVER.

Nay, nay, I only helped despatch the boar,

(*turning to SIR CONRAD.*)

Thy ready reading, cousin, hath for once
Made thee an all too-ready speaker.

(*To the QUEEN and SIR LIONEL.*)

Enough!

A truce to idle words which blunt the edge

Of our discourse. Here come our faithful subjects
To dance the Moorish mask (*turning to the QUEEN.*)
 You wished to see,
And to receive their duties at our hands.

SCENE V.

(Enter PEASANTS who bow before the QUEEN and the KING. The KING's DWARF approaches the KING and kneels before him.)

KING ELVER

(placing his hand affectionately on the DWARF'S head.)

Fidelity doth reign unquestioned here!
'Twere well if we were more like thee, good friend,
And made our actions servants to our vows,
Not needles to unprick the bubble sway
Of empty promises.

(The DWARF rises. The KING and QUEEN followed by the Court move across the stage. The KING and QUEEN seat themselves beneath the giant oak. SIR HUGO and SIR BERTRAM remain behind in conversation.)

SIR HUGO.

Didst mark those words?
My mind mistrusts these Moors and mountebanks.

SIR BERTRAM.

And mine; their cloudy countenances point
To coming gusts of evil fortune.

SIR HUGO.

Spies,
May be? The day Margentis came to court
This dwarf was found by Elver in the woods,
Starving.

SIR BERTRAM.

Draw breath. We're late man.....

*(They rejoin the other KNIGHTS grouped near
the KING.)*

KING ELVER *(addressing the PEASANTS)*.

Let the dance proceed.

FIRST PEASANT.

To the King
And his Queen,
Bid good morrow,
And before
Beauty's court
Banish sorrow.

ALL.

So doff we our kerchiefs, most humbly,
 And waiting our good liege's pleasure,
 We'll dance, on the green, to brave Elver's fair queen,
 For love and for joy a full measure.
 Then 'neath the great oak boughs that shelter
 The humble and weak little flower,
 We'll seek his commands, and expect at his hands
 The justice we ask as our dower.

*(The PEASANTS dance. Suddenly the DWARF
 seizes one of the PEASANT CHILDREN, and
 dances with her to the evident amusement of
 the KING and COURT. — The dance ended.)*

KING ELVER.

Most bravely danced.

QUEEN ETHELIND.

A pleasing, novel step.

SIR CONRAD.

So bravely danced that it must needs untie
 The knotted purse-strings of a miser's heart.

(Throws money to the dancers.)

KING ELVER.

I like not all thy doings, cousin mine.

SIR CONRAD

(approaches the KING, as he does so, the DWARF avoids him with a look of hatred).

Thou surely wouldst not blame me for an act
Of generous intent.

KING ELVER.

I would, I trust,

Be always first to praise the man whose step
Has outstripped mine for good, but what thou here
Hast done, is but an evil in disguise.
Who knows if those who grasp thy golden crowns
Were those who needed them the most?

SIR CONRAD

(bowing low before the KING).

The King

Seated upon his throne perceives beyond
The halting sight of less exalted eyes.

(The KING remains seated beneath the great oak to hear the petitions of the PEASANTS; meanwhile the QUEEN accompanied by SIR CONRAD and SIR LIONEL descends, and mingle with the PEASANTS to whom the QUEEN speaks graciously. The QUEEN and SIR LIONEL then approach the dead boar; SIR CONRAD meanwhile watches them attentively and is in turn observed by the DWARF.)

QUEEN ETHELIND (*to* SIR LIONEL).

Pray, tell me more of what befell this morn,
For what concerneth one of our good friends
But pricks the curiosity of woman
To win a fuller knowledge of the facts.

SIR LIONEL.

I do repine this morn was not my last,
If thou dost match me only with thy friends.
Would that I could my love unfold as when,
Mid seas of blossom bursting into bloom,
Thy beauty made this earth a wilderness.

QUEEN ETHELIND.

There is no page within the book of life
Which I would rather see destroyed.

SIR LIONEL.

For me

There never will be book of life which I
Would not destroy to live that page again.
Each letter is a golden cup wherein
My heart doth drink such draughts of wondrous bliss,
That I would spell each sentence o'er and o'er,
And linger on each passage till my soul
Might round the page with its departing sigh.

QUEEN ETHELIND.

Dost dare with burning words to conjure up
Again before my sight th'unhallowed past,
Which thou didst promise sacredly to plunge
Beyond recall, in that dread silence where
Dead hopes, and withered memories are doomed
To dwell.

SIR LIONEL.

Yes, this I dare, and more: for now
I'll even risk the losing of thy love
By casting in the balance of my fate
The doubtful weight of rash temerity.
Meet me to-night.....

*(The KING rises from beneath the oak and bids
farewell to his subjects. Exeunt PEASANTS.)*

SCENE VI.

QUEEN ETHELIND.

Hush! Hush! The King draws near.

SIR CONRAD *(aside to SIR BORS)*.

Her heart has slipped its moorings and upon
The imperious tide of love glides to its fate!

They must meet yet again ere she has time
To cast the anchor of reflection.

QUEEN ETHELIND

*(to the KING, pointing to the wreaths carried
by her handmaids).*

Sire,

I fain would ask for leave to place myself
These votive garlands in the chapel's shrine.

KING ELVER.

Thy absence from our presence will be felt,
But for such object willingly we yield.

SIR CONRAD *(to the QUEEN).*

Perchance my gracious cousin Ethelind
Will let my hands assist her holy task.

QUEEN ETHELIND *(with evident reluctance).*

None may dissuade a soul from prayer, good Coz.

*(The QUEEN and her LADIES-IN-WAITING ascend
to the Chapel. The sun begins to set.)*

KING ELVER *(gazing at the heavens).*

Apace the golden veil of day rolls down
The hollow heaven; already sister worlds

Steal into view. Margentis can with ease
Discern their hidden mysteries to-night.

(To SIR LIONEL and the other KNIGHTS.)

Towards fair Mortalin let us proceed,
And there repair the labours of the chase.

(The HUNSMEN carrying the wild boar, move towards the castle. The KING and his COURTIERs are about to follow, when a COURTIER enters hurriedly accompanied by SIR OTTO travel-stained and weary.)

SCENE VII.

COURTIER.

A messenger from King Carondelet,
Permission seeks that he may lay his tale
Of need unto your Majesty.

KING ELVER.

'Tis well,

Bid him attend on us.

(SIR OTTO advances, as he does so the KING recognises him.)

By my halidom!

Sir Otto, travel-stained and worn beyond
All recognition.

(To SIR OTTO.)

Welcome art thou here,
And if thou canst remove the dread of ill
Which gnaweth lustily upon our heart,
More welcome still wilt thou become.

SIR OTTO.

My liege

I am the bearer of grief-laden news.
Still might my tale a sadder feature wear,
For even through disaster's gloom it smiles,
And with that smile, my royal master sends
His greeting and best wishes to your realm,
And begs that to him may be sent the means
To punish to the quick the Moorish host
Beleaguering his town with such a close
Investiture, that I but owe my life
Unto my gallant steed, whose sorry plight
Attests his ardour and my expedition.

KING ELVER.

Here is an evil that can be redeemed
From out the iron grasp of circumstance
By knightly valour and true chivalry.

SIR OTTO.

My royal master begged your majesty
To come in person to his aid, and lend

Your name of terror, sung by these fierce thieves,
For devil's warning to their wilful brood,
As shield to his dispirited defenders.

KING ELVER.

Go tell his majesty Carondelet
That he may count upon my fullest aid,
And that I'll yield myself no more to sleep
Save in a coat of mail, till I have plucked
This thorn myself from out his glove.

(To SIR LIONEL.)

Acquaint

Our faithful cousin Conrad we have need
Of his devising mind within the council,
And invite our gracious consort to attend
On us at once, but let no barbed fear
Concerning her most noble father hiss
Its cruel shaft within her loving ear.

(To the assembled KNIGHTS.)

My lords, let us consider well our plans,
And then strike home. Sir Otto walk with me.

*(The KING leaves, talking earnestly with SIR OTTO,
followed by his KNIGHTS by the road leading
to the castle.)*

SCENE VIII.

SIR LIONEL (*alone*).

Once more fatality makes me a coward
And what a moment gone was fondest hope,
Is now supreme despair. Once more towards
The loadstone of my fate I drift, a vessel
With neither mast nor rudder, doomed to wreck
Upon a leeward shore. Sir Conrad comes,
Alone!

(SIR CONRAD enters.)

SIR CONRAD.

Well met most gallant Lionel,
Wouldst thou too offer up an orison
For thy good fortune in the chase this morn?

SIR LIONEL.

Not so, I come to bid your Royal Highness,
And Her Majesty attend the King, on whom
Disastrous tidings have this instant burst;
The valiant king Carondelet's domain
Lies at the mercy of a Moorish host
That clasps his castle with an unbroken ring
Of iron.

SIR CONRAD.

Strange and sudden tidings these!

SIR LIONEL.

This very night the flaming torch goes through
The land, and Elver and our lances cross
To France.

SIR CONRAD.

A wise decision! Speed hath won
More victories than generalship. I'll haste
To the king, yet ere I go, I'd drop a word
Of counsel in thine ear. Brave Lionel
A liking for thy goodly qualities
Has so enlightened my poor slothful mind,
That all thy hopes and wishes I divine.
Be not devoid of purpose nor despair,
But as a mariner on summer seas
Doth wet his finger, that he may perceive
Which way the coming breath inclines: so now
On the rolling stone of opportunity
Do thou but whet thy mind, that it may give
A courage thy unaided heart denies.
Remember that the stillest, darkest hour
Of night, is herald to the glowing dawn!

So 'tis with thee, and thy desires; but spread
Thy sail before the favouring breeze that plays
The joyous harbinger to Hope's bright sun
And I will warrant thee against a loss.

SIR LIONEL.

Speak not, Sir, to a soldier's mind in riddles.

SIR CONRAD.

The queen, here to converse with me returns.
It is a crime to let this rose of France
Wind her sweet tendrils round this aged oak
Whose withered branches cast a blight upon
The peerless splendour of her noon-tide bloom.
What man! dost think that woman speaks her mind?
Oft when she frowneth "no" on her sweet face,
Within her throbbing heart she smileth "yes"!

(Exit SIR CONRAD towards the castle.)

SIR LIONEL *(alone)*.

What if this friendly counsellor were right?
And all my fears but phantoms of the mind?
Then why not launch my fortunes in this bark,
However weak and frailly built it be,

And sail as constant as the pulse of Time,
With daring at the helm and hope supreme
Upon the prow, to paradise or ruin?

.....

But stay! Have all my hopes, my knightly vows,
Have all my golden dreams of faith and honour
But withered in the bud, and turned to briars,
As wild and thorny as have e'er enclosed
The heart of selfish man? Has friendship's meed
Which filled my empty beaker to the brim,
Now turned to nought but rank and deadly poison,
That I should weave such vile, accursed plans
To mar what Elver prizes more than life?
No, on the brink of this unfathomed gulf
Dark with the darkness of the nether world,
I'll crush my rebel heart, and conquering hear
The exultant choirs of heaven intoning "saved!"

(In the distance the voices of the choir in the chapel sound like an answer to Sir Lionel's invocation. Suddenly SIR LIONEL who perceives the QUEEN approaching becomes as one petrified. An instant later he glides noiselessly amid the trees.)

SCENE IX.

(The QUEEN enters alone. The moon slowly rises.)

QUEEN ETHELIND.

Unwilling all to hear what I shall hear,
Come I to see a man my heart suspects,
By that strange intuition which pertains
To every woman from her birth, and leaves
The boasted logic of man's common sense
A limping laggard in the race for truth.

(Looking round.)

'Twas here he promised to reveal the plot
Against my hapless life. Where can he be?

SIR LIONEL

(who has been gazing at the QUEEN as though fascinated by some strange power, now glides towards her, seizing her hands, kneels at her feet and says, almost as though speaking to himself.)

Our love shall all defy, shall all defy,
And every doubt shall vanish in a kiss.

QUEEN ETHELIND

(excitedly, trying to escape from SIR LIONEL).

You here! I may not listen to such words.

SIR LIONEL

(continuing as though he heard her not).

But say me yes again, and all my soul
Will rise upon the crest of hope, and view
The past and future with a like disdain.

QUEEN ETHELIND.

Sir,I do beseech thee unhand me.

(SIR LIONEL rises, but he still detains the QUEEN.)

SIR LIONEL.

Dost thou remember? 'Twas upon a night
Which would hoodwink the keenest sense to know
A shade of difference from the present one,

*(The QUEEN sinks upon the seat beneath the oak
and SIR LIONEL kneels at her feet.)*

That we first met. The jealous sun had hid
His minished self, unable to endure
The fairer beauty of the silent moon.
From ev'ry copse soft whisp'ring sighs did breathe
Sweet counsel of a happy langour thus:—
From ev'ry bud a fragrance such as brings

The secret of an hour long past again
Unto our blinded senses.....

*(The QUEEN tries to rise. SIR LIONEL prevents
herwith increasing fervour he continues.)*

And conveys
Unto our hearts the courage to avow,
What nature pours within our timid ear,
When at the witching hour of eve, the day
And night yield up the meaning of their birth
And whisper: "I am thine and thou art mine".
Fly with me.....

QUEEN ETHELIND *(rising hastily)*.

No! No!

SIR LIONEL.

Far from hence, a land
Unknown shall marvel at our wondrous love,
No cloud.....

QUEEN ETHELIND.

It may not be—it must not be.....
And yet.....

SIR LIONEL.

Thy heart speaks what thy lips refuse,
And by its beating yields a sweet consent.

QUEEN ETHELIND.

O Love! I pray thee pause, and save us both
From

SIR LIONEL.

Bliss that never mortal knew before!
(The chapel bell begins to toll.)

QUEEN ETHELIND.

Dost hear?

SIR LIONEL.

I hear no sound!

QUEEN ETHELIND.

Within the chapel
For the lost souls they pray.

SIR LIONEL.

For me too late!
'Twere better far to be condemned with thee
Than enter Paradise alone.

QUEEN ETHELIND.

Dost hear
It says remorse, eternally remorse.
(Freeing herself from SIR LIONEL.)
My heart thou hast enslaved, but not my soul.

SIR LIONEL

(trying to detain her.)

Not heaven itself hath love like mine!

(At this moment the voices of the choir are heard singing within the chapel. SIR LIONEL transfixed, remains motionless for a moment, the QUEEN leaves hurriedly.)

SIR LIONEL.

And all

The wailing choirs of Heaven shall echo "Lost!"

(The beacon for the war flares up on the crest of the hill adjoining the castle.)

The beacon for the holy war is lit!

Atonement lies this path alone I'll hew

My way to death that wipes out every stain!

(SIR LIONEL draws his sword and holding it as a cross, kisses the blade, and then hurries towards the castle.)

(THE CURTIAN DESCENDS RAPIDLY.)

UNAWARES

THROUGH Eve's white wingèd silence,
Earth's only child
Floating mid silver islands,
In sorrow smiled
Upon the gathering gloom wherein the day
Hid her despair for what had passed away,
For what was trebly lost, her lovely moon,
Since it did die,
She knew not why,
Alas! so soon.

That night amid my slumbers,
A bird unknown,
Singing its mournful numbers
In monotone,

Thrust in my happy heart his shaft of sound,
Pierced in my heart of hearts a wound profound,
Whose cruel lips, Love's lips alone could seal,
 Whose pain, Love's voice,
 Bidding rejoice,
 Alone could heal.

For this is what rang clearest
 Unto the sky,
"Those who to heaven are nearest
 The soonest die."
These sorrow-laden words to me did seem
The never ending burden of his theme.
Until I cried:—"Oh! Love, this wild lament
 Shall never toll
 For thy dear soul
 Earth's banishment.

This song no meaning beareth—
 Its scentless flowers—
No joy of being shareth
 With love like ours—

Scarce justice more than human would confess
The ruin of such wondrous happiness,
No power in heaven or hell is fain
 To disentwine
 Thy life from mine,
 And make us twain."

And yet my heart is burning
 Alone this eve,
And for the past is yearning
 Without reprieve,
The Earth it is so dark, without the light
Wherein my wayward spirit grew upright,
For she who was my shrine, my only creed,
 In heaven for me,
 Unceasingly,
 Doth intercede.

Upon her heartstrings playing,
 Her only lute,
I know that she is saying,
 "Some day the fruit

We see not, still will bloom, the buds are rife
For blowing on his barren tree of life,
He yet will sing with me in unison,
 Befall whate'er,
 Joy or despair,
 'God's Will be done'."

And what if every river
 Of Faith were dry?
If Fate's now empty quiver
 I did defy?
What if I could not, would not bend the knee
To One my heart proclaims unjust to me?
What if my trust, my love of God were slain?
 If I rebel
 As infidel,
 Can He complain?

O God! we have so little,
 And Thou hast all,
Our joys are all so brittle,
 So soon to fall;

Surely that which Thou givest is our own?
Would'st Thou reap here Thy harvest ere 'tis grown?
How could'st Thou where we hid mid Love's sweet maze
 Let Death draw nigh?
 Henceforth shall I
 To Thee give praise?

Of earth and heaven despairing,
 Thus did I rave,
Yet God in love forbearing
 My sin forgave;
Once more amidst my sleep the selfsame bird,
Singing his plaintive song this morn I heard:
From out his sheath of sorrow he drew his dart,
 And in its place
 Left God's sweet grace
 To ease the smart.

"She whom thy heart reclaimeth"—
 Such was his song—
"Thy selfishness misnameth
 Amidst the throng

Of those that own the sorrows of our birth,
For she belonged to heaven, and not the earth;
An angel's love was thine, and 'twas thy prayers
 Kept her alone,
 Far from her own,
 All unawares."

I who would cage no creature,
 In earth or sky,
Believing some faint feature
 Of God doth lie
In everything that breathes, have sought to keep
An angel bound! Well may I mourn and weep,
I who am nothing more than quickened dust,
 Behold I kneel!
 Thus I reveal
 Who was unjust.

THE ENCHANTED OCEAN

FROM the busy, anxious town,
Come, lads! Hurry hurry down
To the port so calm and still,
Nestling 'neath the wind-swept hill,
Where the harbour's arms enclose
And protect when the tempest blows,
Many a goodly brigantine,
That hath ventured o'er the line,
Many a high-pooped caravel
That hath ridden the Typhoon's swell,
Strange hermaphrodite rigged barks
Trading o'er waters where the shark's
Dark shadow like a cloud doth pass
O'er reefs of pearls mid seas of glass,
Shining 'neath skies of burnished brass.

Hark! the windlass jubilant
To the seaman's lusty chant
Turneth, and the anchor glides
Up the calked and tarry sides.

Now there's cheering on the quay,
Now the hawsers slipping free,
O'er the stony pavement glide
Like serpents sinuous, and slide
Into the foaming wake that speeds
Shoreward, as the land recedes
Ever swifter to the gaze.
Now a vessel heaves in stays,
And freed at last she speeds across
The harbour's bar where the breakers toss,
Swift as a wide-winged albatross.

Far, far away
Across the bay,
Past rocky cape
Her winged shape
Each sail unfurled,
At the breeze's whim,
Like the seabird skims,
Till her fair form dims
Where pours the surge
O'er the ocean's verge,
To the underworld.

And now her tall masts sink and swim
O'er the horizon's violet brim,
Into the sunset's iridescent rim.

Oh! happy, happy ship
To rise and dip
On curling crests,
And rounded breasts
Of summer seas.
Where liquid miles
Bask in the smiles
Of purple isles,
And balmy gales
Swell reefless sails
Through broad degrees.
While 'neath thy keel the green tides slip,
While from thy bow the salt waves drip
The world's wide beaker foaming at thy lip.

Fair and free with a flowing sheet,
Chasing a herd of dolphins fleet,
Cleaving the crests of the sparkling deep,
For many a day may thy keen bows sweep,

Past moving swards of green seaweed,
Where the bright star-fishes float and feed,
Past the fairy sail of the nautilus
And the demon arms of the octopus,
Midst the flying fishes' sunny flights,
And unknown islands of strange delights,
Where the gypsy souls of the rovers cast
For a space their anchors—where the world's outcast
Can dream that the breath of the boundless main
Has cleansed the past from its ebon stain,
That remorse with its hideous, living shroud
Has passed like the shade of the fleeing cloud,
That life, sweet life with its golden spring
His boyish heart is welcoming!

Or, shall thy helmsman boldly steer
Up, up through the northern hemisphere,
Where the towering icebergs silently stream
Like sheeted ghosts by the vessel's beam,
And the storm winds whistle to and fro
Through the cordage of ice, midst the driving snow,
Where the gleaming lights at the forecastle's head
Gaze fearsomely down at the phantom dead,

That toss their arms from beryl waves,
While stark and still in their crossless graves,
Mid treasures untold their skeletons lie,
Watching maybe with a jewelled eye
The ocean's miracles passing by.

Wherever thy rudder guides o'er the breast
Of the fickle seas—whate'er thy quest,
Day after day the dull routine
Of duties that seemingly demean,
Loyally, thankfully must be met.
For this is life's whole alphabet!
Through the listless calm, or the favouring gale
That buries deep the martingale
In showers of spray, the sailor must keep
The dreary watch till the planets peep
On eve's sweet face, and virginal airs,
Or the sun from the waste of waters flares.
Now the log must be heaved, and the flying strands
Paid out till the glittering, whirling sands
In the second-glass their course have run,
Then stopped like a flash! and one by one,
Hand over hand, each coloured tie,
That tells how fast the sea-miles fly,

Must be hauled on board, now the pipe has sung,
And the fore-yard arms must be braced and swung,
Or the spinakers brailed, the topsails clewed,
With now and then an interlude
Of change, as when the look-out shouts
That right in her track the sperm-whale spouts,
Or spies in the offing a glistening sail,
Through the steaming noon-tide's hazy veil,
And the eager crew to the bulwark crowds,
Or clambers up in the humming shrouds
To wave a welcome,—but none returns
From the phantom ship! and the spirit learns
The tole it must pay for love of the sea,
And all its mocking witchery.
Then, to their hearts like the icy breath
That floats from the caves of the isles of Death,
Steals the sense of their utter loneliness,
And for an instant, but no more,
They stand in the opened cottage door,
And gaze on the love-lit eyes that weep
For the souls that are roaming the treacherous deep.

Whatever may be this vessel's behest
We pray to-day that her course be blest.

Joyous and fruitful be her lot,
And may her helmsman hearken not
To the siren's song, when the winds die down,
And the midnight moon, with its golden crown
Shines through the stagnant cloud's dark bars
On a glassy ocean aflame with stars,
When each halyard block and swivel swings
From side to side on their clanking rings,
When the yawing stay-sails idly flap
O'er the unknown currents that lisp and lap
In pale phosphorescent eddies, and curl
Round the vessel's hull with a dulcet swirl,
Like the low soft musical murmuring stir
Of the coming storm through a giant fir.

For this is the marvellous mystical hour
When the spirits of air in their caverns cower
'Neath the magical spell of the merman's power,
When the lulling, languorous sigh and sob
Of the ocean's tides, as they pulse and throb
Over and under each hidden reef,
Are but the echoes of songs of grief
The mermaid croons, as she offers for toy
A mariner's skull to her baby boy,

Or tosses him up for her lover to see,
As he lolls on the seaweed lazily,
Splashing and dashing with fish's tail
The tranquil main, and each mackerel scale
That bedecks and begirts his monstrous thews
Shimmers with weird opalescent hues.
This too is the time when the merman woos
The loveliest sea-nymphs from the rocks,
Where they sit twining dishevelled locks,
Beside the mirror-like sapphire pools,
All weary from chasing the flying schools.

See! From the breast of the slumbering deep,
Like a fountain, suddenly, waters leap,
And a shaggy triton with bronzen skin,
Matching the dolphin's blue-green fin
Appears! High aloft his fingers hold
The rarest prize the waves enfold,
The hideous ghastly saw-like sword
Of the ocean's pitiless pirate lord,
Whom even Leviathan's prowess dreads.
Leagues down on one of the sea's dark beds,
Beneath the hulk of a man of war,
Whose guns are voiceless evermore,

He spied him, fast asleep, this morn,
And with a broken davit, torn
From the splintered bulwarks of the wreck,
He slew him. See! His big brown neck,
Which he did barely guard in time,
Is wounded, and with gory slime
His beard is matted. For a full
Sea-hour they fought amidst the hull,
Whose iron ribs, like forest trees
Protection from his enemy's
Swift blade afforded, when his doom
Seemed certain, and the angry spume
From his mad adversary's jaws
Struck him, as he would dive, and pause
For breath behind a shield of rust,
So nigh had passed the monster's thrust.

And lo! The mermaids' uncrowned queen,
Whose glittering locks of amber screen
A beauty unknown to eyes terrene,
Is stirred from her fair statuesque repose,
And rises in dew like a golden rose,
To gaze with emerald orbs afire,
Lit with hungry unquenched desire,

At the treasure trove, from which alone
Their sighed-for combs are made. Her own
It must be! Along the slippery ledge
She slides, near and nearer to the edge
That overhangs the gulf, where swims
Her tempter, and with beauteous limbs
All luminous with a wondrous sheen
Of argent pearl and aquamarine,
She dives, a rainbow seen through mist,
A blaze of silver and amethyst!
They are gone! Nought but an eddy slight
Reveals this passing idyll's flight, *
And now, behold! a racing stream
Of bubbles rise, and burst,—a gleam
Of their warm breaths, that interlace
In their invisible headlong chase
To some twilight cavern. All forlorn
Her wayward playmates, half in scorn,
And half in jealous love, upbraid
Her flight. Long would their shrill tirade
Of blending anger and lament
Have voiced their queen's self-banishment,
For their proud hearts were sore displeased,
Had not a sudden panic seized

Their clamour as a shadow vast,
Appalling, misshaped, overcast
Their circle, and a voice wherein
The murmur of primeval Sin,
Commingled with the wail and roar
Of spirits from the uttermost shore
Of hell, bade them, as they had vowed,
Sing ever the song of the seaman's shroud.
Behold! A ship with unheavèd lead,
By the dutiful tides all day misled,
For the sunken Islands of the Dead
Is drifting, let them straight obey
Their mandate, to entice and slay.

Oh! Helmsman, slumber not
In this dread spot,
For evil spirits plot
Thy overthrow.
Blow winds, blow!
Fierce or low,
Man's fairest foe
In her dark grot
Is spinning the web of thy endless woe!
On her lofty throne

Of human skulls,
And shattered hulls,
With a dazzling zone
Of which each hasp,
And burning clasp
Is a flaming fear,
With a diadem
Of which each gem
Is a frozen tear,
Most sorrowful,
Most beautiful,
Doth she appear.

In the dim twilight
Thus she sits and sings,
While she swiftly flings
With her fingers deft,
First from left to right,
Then from right to left,
Her web of Night
In eddying rings,
And on either side,
Where she doth preside,
Fiercely without reprieve,

Pallid maidens weave,
With their fair heads bowed,
The seaman's seamless shroud.

Ever up and down
Are the shuttles thrown,
They are of red gold,
Wondrous to behold
In the dark,
Like the gleaming spark
From fierce forges blown,
Rising but to fall,
Falling but to rise,
Thus each shuttle plies,
Thus they weave the pall,
For the souls that sink
From the ocean's brink,
Through the crystal tide,
Their dead eyes opened wide,
With ghastly horror petrified.

Or shall some hapless soul perchance,
Weary of this world's dissonance,

And its mysterious riddle pain,
With broken heart and crazèd brain,
Descend rejoicing in the sea,
And in some grotto peacefully
There rest, and watch the white sea shells
Falling like snow in the ocean's dells,
Or the snow storm passed, the scaly mail
Of a fish to his fancy becomes a sail,
As he lies on an isle of waving palms
Where the air is burdened with odorous balms,
And by some languorous still lagoon
He is gazing out on the tropic's noon
From the soothing shade, with half-closed eye,
While over the reef with a whispering sigh,
The salt wave spills its silver foam,
And his soul resolves no more to roam.

See the helmsman nods
Drowsily,
To the enchanted strains
Of the Sirens of the Sea,
And the rudder chains,
Loosed of guiding hand,
With the course at odds,
Seek the sunken strand.

Blow winds, blow!
Fierce or low,
It matters not,
Oh, helmsman wake
For thy vessel's sake,
Else shall she rot,
By man forgot,
'Neath the salt sea brine
And thy arms entwine
By slow degrees
With the coral trees,
Where sea anemonies
 Incarnadine
With gorgeous blooms
The wave's white tombs.

Blow winds! Blow
The halyards from the blocks,
 Better far
The tempest's roar
And the dreaded shocks
Of the ocean's war,
Than the murderous gore
 Of hidden rocks.

Now the orb of night
 As she wanes,
In her pilgrimage
Through the starry lanes,
By a strange mirage
All the senses cheats,
And herself repeats
With a sweet delight
In four golden moons,
Like a cross of fire
On a sunlit spire,
In bright summer noons.
While the helmsman dreams
'Neath their icy beams,
Dreams of sin and ruth,
Dreams of grace and truth,
Dreams of scenes of youth,
Sees the cot where he was born,
Smiling midst the full-eared corn,
Sees the mottled sun and shade
Quivering on a rock o'erlade
With moss and lichen, in a glade
Of spreading oaks, whence he has thrown,
Oft with his schoolmates, oft alone,

The chainless anchor, the lineless lead,
Now the clover and new-mown hay
He scents, and now, at close of day,
The humid breath of the fresh ploughed earth,
With its dream of one creation's birth,
Stirs his being to its depths: then a voice
Calls softly, and his broken toys
He sees them all 'neath the old armchair,
And by the burning peat's red glare,
The form of his mother seated there,
Listening to his evening prayer.
Now 'tis morn and the great barn door
He unbars, and the oxen yokes,
Now the harvest carts once more
He rides afield, and the shire-horse strokes,
And now again he feels the fleece
Of the flocks, and now the blessed peace
Of God's day, and clear, so clear,
And near
On his slumbering ear
Sounds the vesper bell
On the evening air,
That his dream it doth dispel,
And he starts up in despair.

All is dark, the moon hath fled,
And a speechless unknown dread
Overflows his soul, the lead
Tremblingly, in haste, he heaves,
Can it be the dark deceives?
First full fathoms nine,
Now but fathoms three
 Are on the line!
 Can it be?

O'er the vessel's side he leans
And listens, and at first he gleans—
From the pitchy darkness—nought!
Till to his anxious ear is brought
A hideous, ominous thunder afar,
The sonorous boom of surf on the bar,
As when we list in an empty shell,
And hear the distant indefinite roar
Of breakers that beat on an unknown shore,
And it seems as if the vesper bell,
To his o'erwrought fancy, was ringing his knell.

Not a breath of air!
Nothing but darkness everywhere,

If only the anchor were arip
But it is lashed to the fated ship.
There is no time to set it free,
And cast it as bait to the ravenous sea!
No hope! The barque of life is doomed,
All, all thereon must be entombed
In the vasty deep ere set the stars,
And when morn shall break her tapering spars,
Like idle straws strewn on the waves
Alone shall mark the mariners' graves.

Surely a breath of air did chill
His clammy brow? Nay all is still!
'Twas but a fancy, nothing stirred,
Yet hist! A far off sigh is heard,
And the compass lights that were burning low,
Are shining now with a fiercer glow.
The topsails rustle far above,
The ponderous mainsail seems to move,
A whiff hath cooled his burning cheeks,
Listen! The jib-boom faintly creaks,
Slow and silent the closed sheets ope,
A breeze is coming, and with it Hope!
As the slumbering wild swan waking,

Startled at a dead branch cracking,
'Neath the feet of hunters tracking,
Her wide snowy wings outshaking,
Saves from death her beauteous being;
From the isles of Sorrow fleeing,
From the pitiless chill embraces
Of the daughters of the sea,
So the vessel sunward races,
Mocking all their witchery!
Out from the gloom where perils yawn,
Into the breath of the sweet sea dawn,
From the Enchanted Ocean flying,
And the fate of its wistful sorrowful sighing
Into the world's deep mystery
Ploughing Life's venture joyfully.

Thus may it be with the gallant ship
That in the trail of the setting sun
Fades, like a glowing spark. Afar
The belfry on the headland lifts
Its votive voice, calling the heart
To prayer. Let us friends thither wend,
And in the sanctuary built
As offering to the unknown dead

Cast by the sea on treacherous shores,
We'll raise our voice in prayer to Him
Who is above all creeds, all law.
To Him, the helmsman of the stars
The Pilot of Life's frailest barque.
Now one by one the harbour lights
Flash out, already it is dark!
The chapel bell hath ceased, all's still;
So still: one feels a portent near
And round the headland, suddenly
A vessel's lights, from the gloomy void
Loom up, and to the harbour glide,
Symbol of that great heaven where,
The universal fleet of souls
Secure shall ride. Until that hour
O Barque of Life, God speed to thee!

LIFE'S SHADOW

SEATED at my door at midday,
Half in sunshine, half in shade,
Listening to the goat-bells tinkling
In a far-off alpine glade.

Spinning cobwebs of the fancy,
Finer than the spider weaves,
Harkening to the droning insects,
In the lilac-scented eaves.

Straight from out the circling forest,
Dark and gloomy as a tomb,
Rode a shadowy knight in armour,
Brave of form, and bright of plume.

Gleaming in the mellow sunshine,
Curbing not his prancing steed,
Rode this gallant, gazing ever
On the flower encrusted mead.

Shadow, shadow, whither? whither?
Cried I; but his lips were dumb;
With his hand he only beckoned,
And behold! I needs must come.

Quicker, quicker, ever quicker
After him my spirit raced,
Till upon his jewelled stirrup,
Swift an outstretched hand I placed.

Then, as quick as thought, my fingers,
Firm and fast as in a vice,
By this unknown knight were pinioned
In his bony hand of ice,

And from that same moment ever,
With this stranger I must scour,
Seeking for the buds of passion,
And the pleasures of the hour.

Oft I tried to stay this phantom
That I might his face perceive,
But he ne'er would raise his vizor,
Ne'er my doubting fears relieve.

When, at last, my guide dismounted,
And I thought our race was o'er,
In an instant we were speeding
Ever faster than before.

Whirling, whirling, madly whirling,
Like a butterfly in a breeze,
Flitting on from flower to flower,
Looting with the robber bees.

Clasping for a fleeting moment
What we deemed our heart's desire,
Wooing eyes of woe, and sipping
Poisoned draughts from lips of fire.

Then, as day was slowly ending,
To the charnel-house we sped,
And within its gruesome precincts
Kept carousal with the dead.

Thence he dragged me—when we may not
For an empty life atone—
To the grave, there raised his vizor,
Lo! his features were my own.

"LOVE'S ON THE WING"

(A madrigal)

SING, sing,
Let the woods ring
With the gladness of spring,
Drop the distaff,
Let the heart quaff
Youth's rapturous bliss;
The swallows shall bring
To the gallant a kiss,
To the damsel a ring.
Far away fling
The briars of care,
The weeds of despair;
Laugh, laugh,
As light as the air.
The sap is in flood,
Life's in the bud,
And love's on the wing.

THE LAND OF DREAMS *

WHERE heavenward arch flame-guarded avenues,
Bursting on seas of opalescent hues,
Upon whose wave the soul can sail and sail,
Letting thereon its gorgeous pinions trail,
Until aweary in some still lagoon
It turns aside, therein to swoon and swoon.
Lulled by the murmur of unnumbered streams,—
This, ah! this is in the land of dreams.

Where pour vast floods within a chasm dark,
Bearing upon their desperate waves a bark
Of gossamer, wherein the soul of man,
Crouching expectant of his end, doth scan
A pyramid of night that bars his way,
Around whose base relentless whirlpools play,
All luminous with subterranean beams, —
This, ah! this is in the land of dreams.

* Suggested by a sketch of Hamilton Aïde's.

Where music like sweet incense from the soul,
Higher and higher climbs until its goal
Amid the listening stars it doth attain,
From whence, enthroned, a ceaseless golden rain
Of melody it scatters through the void,
Rejoicing, till the farthest asteroid
Enraptured listens to its god-like themes,—
This, ah! this is in the land of dreams.

Where, on a lonely mount at eve, recline
In pensive attitudes of grace supine,
The Sisters three—Faith, Hope, and Charity,
Gazing upon a boundless flowery lea,
While slowly o'er the horizon's burning bar,
Like a benediction soars the shepherd's star,
Bright with the love-ray all mankind redeems,—
This, ah! this is in the land of dreams.

Where a pale figure in the grizzly dawn
Pleads for a crumb, her ragged shawl tight drawn
About her starving infant; where the heart,
If it would live, must play another's part;
Where often on the wheel of circumstance
The proudest soul is broken, where blind chance
Only of tear-stained mimes the showman seems,—
This, ah! this is not the land of dreams.

FAITHLESS

A knight of the Cross is bidding
Farewell to his lady fair,
Round his heart as a gage she twineth
A lock of her sunny hair.

'Neath the crescent moon of the desert,
A knight lies stark and dead,
And the famished jackals are snarling,
At the vultures overhead.

For a bolt from a bow lies buried,
Where once shone that golden ring,
And the tress round its shaft entwined
Is as dark as the condor's wing.

SUNRISE AT SEA

WHEN with a ghostly, icy shiver
The dying night the winds deliver,
From their bondage in the caverns of the earth,
And the host of zephyrs singing
With a deep delicious mirth,
Through dawn's purple portal winging,
Seek their glorious realms of birth;
Then from out the violet vapours,
'Neath the ebbing silver lustre
Of the asteroids that cluster
 Round the goary,
 Grim and hoary
 Planet Mars,
And the fainting, flickering tapers
 Of the waning stars;
Leaps a radiant fairy palace,
Soars a glittering dome of wonder,

Whereon every eye may ponder,
Springs to birth and being yonder,
Like a jewelled opal chalice
With fierce jets of fire studded
And rich ruby nectar flooded.
Where the wave with heaven merges,
From the void the vision surges
With a fairy, crystal gladness,
O'er a mystic sea of sadness,
And amidst this sailess ocean,
With a weird uncertain motion
Floats each burnished, brazen story
Of this cupola of glory.
From this dazzling rampart streaming,
Twisted colonnades are gleaming
Like some flaming funeral pyre
Of some passionate dead desire,
Rising higher, and yet higher,
Till they tremble and expire
In proud minarets of amber,
Or in spires of alabaster
That majestically clamber,
Ever faster, and yet faster
To the zenith, where they banish
Twilight's shadows, and then vanish!

Now the vault of rainbow falters,
And the gossamer pageant alters,
Changing into golden mountains,
From whose summits lava fountains
Heavenward rise from giant forges,
Or descend through emerald gorges.
Leaping down through beryl vallies,
Pouring thence in diamond sallies,
Into seas of flame, where galleys
Bright with pennant flag, and streamer,
Pass before th' enchanted dreamer,
Rich with spoils from cities burning,
Crowned with triumph home returning.
Now the mounts and vales dividing,
Or together gently gliding,
Open vistas never ending
Where on wings of hope ascending,
Fleeing from earth's fierce ordeals,
For a space, the soul attaineth

Inaccessible ideals.

Oh! the beauty that enchaineth
Man's desire to these far regions,
Where bright visions troop in legions,
And despair's wild bell of sorrow
Wakes no dark uncertain morrow,

Where with starry eyes of fancy
On her throne of necromancy,
Earth and heaven reconciling
Sits sweet Hope for ever smiling.

Now th' enraptured eye discovers
'Gainst the sky the jasper towers
Of Atlantis, phoenix risen
From its night beclouded prison,
Here earth's wayworn, weary lovers
Rest in bliss 'neath dreamy bowers,
Or amidst its orchards wending
Pluck the golden fruit of Eden,
Pluck sweet joys by Fate forbidden,
Taste of happiness unending.
Now the hanging gardens sinking,
Rosy islands interlinking,
Float across the azure heaven,
Where the eye of fancy, even,
Seems to see the altars burning
For which man's proud soul is yearning.
Yet once more these beacons dying,
From the four winds swiftly flying,
Monstrous genii meet, and mutter
Unknown words of hidden presage

Words whose ghastly, lurid message
Man can feel, but cannot utter;
Then from their dread incantation
Bursts a blinding conflagration,
And behold amid this furnace
Beasts and birds of deadly menace
Wheel before man's gaze an instant,
Then to realms of night far distant,
In the King of Death's Dominions,
On their amethystine pinions,
Sail away,
And it is day!.....

MEMORY

(A Song)

O! Memory, sad memory,
Why dost thou haunt me so?
Yet now that thou art come again,
I would not have thee go.

For thou hast spoken with a voice
That brings me such sweet pain,
That once was all the world to me
And broke my heart in twain.

Oh! Memory, dark memory!
From silence let us fly
Unto the roaring waves of life,
That thou therein may'st die.

THE THREE ROSES

THREE roses clung to my dungeon-keep,
Haunting the realms of my fettered sleep,
And high above, from my lonely tower,
I watched them grow from hour to hour.
The first bright golden flames unfurled,
Like the sun when it soars from the underworld:
The second, a blood-red soul confessed;
And the third was white as the wild waves crest.

Dreaming, I gazed on a maiden fair,
Tall and graceful and debonair,
From the baron's banqueting hall she strayed
To the foot of my dungeon undismayed.
While whispering low in her shell-shaped ear,
Her richly accoutred cavalier
His tale of love despairing told,
Till he won her smile with my rose of gold.

One flower was gone against my will,
And I prayed that the others might linger still
For my captive eyes, that could not fare
In the world beyond, to claim their share
Of the budding blooms in the hedgerows, sown
By the merciful hand of God alone.
Small blame at their shrine I bowed the knee,
Since their scent was the breath of Liberty.

Each moment I missed the rich rose less,
While her sisters lightened my dark duress,
Each moment my dungeon's evil name
Was solace to me; for no one came
Too near the abode of my despair,
For ghost and goblin were masters there:—
Each time the sentry passes by
He crosses himself with averted eye!

.

Then changed my dream, and I saw on Life's span
The mystical hours when the spirits of man
Must part from the earth. On the selfsame day
The roses and I were to pass away

Each down its current of silence borne,
'Mid slumberous banks to a shadowless morn,
Where the rose and the spirit shall understand
Why the petals of Life bestrew the land.

Yet as the harvest moon rose clear,
Over rampart and turret, tier on tier,
Two maidens swept from the palace door,
Whence rang the song of a troubadour.
Like the first fair maid to my tower they came,
Nor dreaded the spell of its evil name,
I saw them approach with a chill dismay,
For I knew they would bear my buds away.

Like rivers of night o'er a burning wold,
Swept the first ones locks over cloth of gold,
Fairer of form than of face was she
And she bore herself right royally.
The second, a willow-wand in grace,
No words may portray her soul-lit face,
Enshrined in its tresses of light that fell
O'er a vesture as white as the asphodel.

Then I cried, "It is well! The roses' hour
Hath come, when all their delicious dower
Of beauty must twine in a sweet embrace
Round these fairer forms of celestial grace.
'Tis meet that they shed on a maiden's breast—
By the sense of their speechless bliss oppressed—
The breath of their fragrance, the grace of their bloom
For I know on earth no sweeter doom."

Through the dungeon bars, all red with rust
From my clammy breath, in haste I thrust
A shrivelled hand that it might crown
Each maid with a rose to match her gown.
Yet swifter than mine a hand stretched forth,
Like an icy breath from the frozen north
Slipt past my own, and before my eyes,
Unflinchingly gave them otherwise.

In the raven locks it quickly trained
The pallid rosebud, while it stained
With a spot of blood where the round breasts met
The bodice of her whose life must yet

Be given for some ennobling end,
Whose glorious purpose, whose infinite trend
Man may not see through earth's prison bars,
No more than I, from my cell, the stars.

Thus, thus it must be! Fate's hand alone,
Obeying the mind that erst has sown
The seed, can give aright Life's bloom.
Who casts the shuttle within the loom
Can break and join the threads anew,
For He hath Life's pattern full in view.
Nought but the seamy side we see,
Through suffering's veil of mystery.

.....

Here, through the still night air, the stroke
Of Time's scythe sounded and I woke,
Just as the dawn was creeping in
Over the battlements, pale and thin.
Up, up the winding stairs I hear
The gaoler's footsteps drawing near,
To bid me stifle my dark despair,
And mount the scaffold frowning there.

No need! In the yard the roses bloom
Unchanged around my living tomb,
Awaiting the sun that may not rise
For these wide-open wistful eyes,
So soon to close, since I dared say
That all mankind should share some day
Its rays; that Liberty doth lead
Nearer to God than a threadbare creed!

Farewell sweet buds! from ye I've gleaned
Much that hath hitherto been screened.
Dread Death! Thine hour has come, we must
Tread the short road, bestrewn with dust
Of man. Yes, we must climb the stair—
Give me thine hand—that leads.....ah! where?
What's this! Thy face is like the sun!
Then thou, O Death! and Life are one?.....
.....

Gaoler, I come!

LIFE'S MELODY

FROM the cruel, crafty city,
From its ceaseless roar and hum,
To the happy fields of childhood,
Sore of foot and heart I come.

As of yore the birds are singing
In the budding apple-trees,
As of yore the lambs are bleating,
On the honey-scented leas.

As of yore the trout are leaping
For the May-flies in the pool,
As of yore the children laughing,
Chase each other back from school.

As of yore the mill-wheel turning
Churns the flowing waters dark,
Into flashing streams of jewels,
Falling in a diamond arc.

By its side I'll rest and listen
To its song as yet unsung,—
But ah! never to the music
That it sang when I was young.

THE ISLAND OF THE DEAD

THERE is an island pierced with crystal caves,
Within the splendour of the wooing West,
Beneath whose cliffs the ocean's warring waves
For ever are at rest.

Unmindful of the far-off boisterous wind,
Regretting not its fleeting kiss of foam,
A chain of mournful melody they bind
Around Death's fairest home.

No sound save their sweet lullaby of tears
Stirs the proud melancholy of this spot,
Where the chill blight of Earth's decaying years
In awe intrudeth not.

For all is changeless in this Isle of Sleep,
Within whose cypress groves the soft air broods,
Cooing faint answers to the sobbing deep
 In mellow interludes.

Bathed in the sunset's iridescent breath,
This mausoleum of the departed soars,
A glowing beacon to the barques of Death,
 That glide towards its shores.

As through the ocean of the summer eve,
Singly, the wild swans wing their homeward way,
So through the tideless deep, majestic cleave
 These ships at close of day.

Within the tranquil shadow of the sail
That jealously each barque's proud treasure hides,
While maidens chant the promise of the Grail,
 Their queen the smooth course guides.

From out a veil of tears her starry soul
Shines like the sun through April's dewy rain,
And round her quivering lips Hope's aureole
 Hath all but conquered pain.

What seemed to her, a moment gone, but mist
Athwart the horizon's burnished band of light,
Now as a towering throne of amethyst
Defies the approaching night.

Nigher and nigher the mighty headland looms,
Whiter and whiter shine the cliffs, above
The sails that close beneath the sheltering tombs
Of those who died for Love.

And now with one long, happy, thankful sigh,
The golden keel divides the golden sand,
While welcoming echoes from each cave reply
Along the sea-girt strand.

As damsels for their virgin tresses cull
Sweet buds with tender, loving, lingering care;
Thus gently, from the barge's wave-stained hull
These mystic figures bear

Their burden up the rock-hewn path, that wends
Amid a winding gorge, whose gloomy wedge
The island's glistening rampart boldly rends
Down to the water's edge.

Between the summit and the shore, midway,
The darkened cleft halts in a sunny vale
Where scented shrouds of violets essay
 To hide the narrow trail.

In this secluded spot against the hill,
A marble portal mars the flowery sod,
Upon whose honeysuckle-covered sill
 No foot has ever trod.

Untouched by human hands, the ponderous slabs
With stifled groans swing back, and from its lair
The icy wind of death darts forth, and stabs
 The balmy summer air.

Deep in this vault of alabaster pure,
Lovingly, upon a roseleaf-cushioned bed,
That nought shall change as long as tears endure
 They lay Love's precious dead.

Then, from this refuge of unbroken sleep,
Against whose ghostly, hollow-sounding door,
The billows of Life's ceaseless storm shall sweep
 Vainly for evermore,

They climb the lofty vine-clad palisade,
With icy feet that chill the earth's warm breast,
Seeking in haste the beryl colonnade
That guards the island's crest.

Unto this temple, where Hope's empty grave
With purple pall of rosemary and thyme,
Its guest awaits beneath a jewelled nave
Wrought by the hand of Time,

They pass, and storming with sweet-voiced assault,
Its ramparts, on this tomb bright roseleaves throw,
That they have gathered in the marble vault
A thousand feet below.

Then down the cliff, o'er which already falls
A dusky veil, their swift steps they retrace,
While wizard echoes from the darkening walls,
Their fleeing footsteps chase.

And now the voices of the Night-winds steal
Seaward, and bid Life's Destinies embark;
Along the shore, where waits the expectant keel
In the fast gathering dark.

Forth on the ocean's shrouded face they fare,
While far above, still in the sunset's fire,
The temple's twisted crystal columns flare
 An instant, and expire.

And when at last Hope's shattered harp shall sound
Its dying note in Death's exultant ear,
And earth's torn heart shall feel its last love-wound,
 And shed its last love-tear,

Then as the wailing stars watch overhead
Across a frozen sea, Hope's bier shall glide,
And in this crowning tomb its peerless dead
 Shall peacefully abide.

And through the eternal pathways of the air,
Another moon around our sun shall spin,
And from that hour nor rapture nor despair
 Of life shall dwell therein.

PAN'S CHOICE

A voice golden-vestured with sunshine,
Starry-crowned with the rapture of youth,
Arose from the heart of a being
That sang by the fountain of Truth.

Through the dark aisles of cypress surrounding,
Where others in trembling had strayed,
Like the babble of brooklets rejoicing
It danced through the slumberous glade.

Young Pan dropped his reed-pipes to listen,
The turtle-dove held its sweet voice,
The shepherd who wandered a-wooing
Spake not to the maid of his choice.

In its cradle of miracles, nature
Lay entranced, like an infant that lies
In the arms of its mother, and hearkens
To her singing, with half-opened eyes.

Through the gloom-haunted valley of Silence,
Soared the song on the wings of the breeze,
And the spirits concealed in its caverns
Knelt no more to Fear's lurid decrees.

Exultant they rose upon tip-toe,
To list to this pæan of mirth,
That promised the children of nature
A balm for the sorrows of birth.

Then the pale-visaged sister of Envy,
Who sat by the fountain of Lies,
Was alarmed for her kingdom of shadows,
For her spectre-reaped harvest of sighs.

From her ambush of discord arising,
Loud laughed she in pitiless pride,
And afar, from the crests in the desert,
The mocking hyenas replied.

The groves became still as by magic,
All silent the whispering trees,
The blossoms and buds listened vainly,
For the murmuring lilt of the bees.

To the depths of their caverns of terror,
Fled the faint-hearted children of Light,
And the rosy-kissed lips of the dryads
Grew grey as the dawn with affright.

Not a brooklet or bird sang its measure,
Not a sound stirred the woods far or near,
O'er the heart-strings of nature, vibrating,
Stretched the glacial fingers of fear.

Till even great Pan's dauntless spirit
Was seized with an unknown alarm,
And he sought with his light-hearted music
To cast off the sinister charm.

But his pipes from the mountains primeval
Awoke not an echoing breath;
And bewildered, he crept through the forest,
To fathom this stillness of death.

O'er the moss-covered boulders, as lightly
And swiftly as startled deer tread,
Peering furtively hither and thither,
The minstrel of pastorals fled.

When at length, in a rift of the forest,
The fountain of Truth he espied,
Enshrined in the virginal blossoms
That bless the fair locks of a bride.

Thither speeding exultant, yet fearful,
He halts, with deep awe-stricken cries,
Gazing down through the spray-veilèd waters,
With despair in his half-human eyes.

Like a rose-leaf by jealous winds shattered,
And cast on the mere's chilly breast,
Encircled by tear-stainèd lilies,
Floats the nymph of his passionate quest.

There, drowned by the hand of Derision,
Bright Innocence slumbering seems,
Whose voice mid the sibilant whispers
Of earth, dark existence redeems.

Wild and fierce rose his impotent anger,
Surging piercingly shrill through the glen,
Till he spied the weird shoe of a monster
That had fled from the children of men.

Then Pan fashioned with resolute fingers,
From this circlet of iron, a hoof
Wherewith he might stamp on the bosom
Of earth his undying reproof.

Down the dark stony gorge of the mountain,
The flash of his false hoof is seen,
With the elves and the fire-flies dancing,
Where the winter-fed torrent hath been.

And the peasant that stares through his lattice
At the revel of lights flitting by,
Quickly crossing himself, mutters—"many
In a green winter's graveyard shall lie!"

While the spouse, in her ingle-nook weaving,
Drops her distaff to whisper a prayer,
For the cluster of golden locks sleeping
By the hearth in the peat's ruddy glare.

When the white frozen moon of the tempest,
Struggling up through the stress of the storm,
With the thin riven clouds half concealeth
The grace of her beautiful form,

Then the eye of the shepherd beholdeth,
Standing lone on the waste of the wold,
A fleet-footed shadow that leadeth
The flocks far away from the fold.

Hence to many he ranks as a demon,
At war with the race of mankind,
But the children of Nature still worship
The drone of his pipes on the wind.

And though earth has grown old and forgotten
The Nymph whom Derision did slay,
To her memory Pan still is playing
In our woods and our meadows today.

.

THE TYPHOON

'TIS noon—a rolling waste of molten glass
Reflects the sun's unclouded face of fire,
That hangs, a monstrous shield of burnished brass,
In the dizzy zenith; with unquenched desire
The parched air woos the ocean's throbbing breast,
Whereon since early morn a ship hath lain,
A prisoner to its pillow of unrest,
Tossing like one that seeks relief in vain
From a hideous nightmare of delirious pain.

All day a nameless dread, like a ghostly pall,
O'er the doomed vessel's swaying form hath clung
Invisible to most, yet felt by all!
When by the weary watch eight bells were rung,
Across the bows a rainbow faint and pale
Was seen, and now the glass to their deep concern
Can fall no more! and past the quarter rail,
Where waves with phosphorescent wonders burn,
The shark's dark fin glides by,—but to return.

Suddenly the wind has come, in fitful gusts,
Round with the compass points, it veers apace—
A sign the oldest mariner most mistrusts—
While, where the wave and skyline interlace,
A cloud, no bigger than the hand of man,
Rises, and darts along the horizon's bar,
And as all eyes this ominous marvel scan,
From out its gloomy rampart, from afar,
Float the moanings of the tempest's ruthless war.

The cry of "all hands aloft to shorten sail"
Is heard, and up the swaying ratlines fly
The tars, fearing their haste will not avail;
Swiftly the royals are furled in the darkening sky,
The topsails reefed, while the wail of wild winds drown
The orders voiced by the boatswain's shrillest tune.
Then firmly the oaken hatches are battened down,
Fore and aft the life-lines stretched, not an instant too soon,
Ere with the shriek of bedlam bursts the mad typhoon.

As a traveller caught in a blizzard vast
Bewildered sinks 'neath its blinding blast,
So the vessel lies on her beam-ends cast.

Hard a-weather the steersmen force the helm,
But she answers not, and the billows o'erwhelm
The forecastle; now the green seas pour
Over the bulwarks, when with a roar
Of thunder, piercing the deafening war
Of winds and waves, the head-sails split,
Torn to shreds, and the wrecked bowsprit,
Through the boiling surfs that howl and churn,
Uplifts its head; from stem to stern
The vessel quivers, and through the gloom
Sublimely springs from her watery doom.

Clinging to the life-lines, the crew amazed
At having full in Death's divine eyes gazed,
And yet survived, draw breath, half dazed
With the clouds of stinging, hissing spray,
Puny mortal midgets with fear half crazed,
With nature locked in mortal fray,
With nature's giant energies at bay,
Those who have never prayed, now pray!

Like a twisted ribbon in the blast,
Flies the splintered top-gallant mast
And cordage: yet another crash,
And the towering crests of waters wash

The life-boats from the decks, like straws;
Now suddenly there is a pause,
Wherein the crew take heart once more,
And strive the wreckage in haste to clear,
Yet again the false winds veer,
And blow as ne'er they blew before!

O'er the monstrous billow's glistening dome,
Through yawning gulfs, and pyramids of foam,
Hour after hour the ship fights on:
When as by magic, the storm is gone!
And through the clouds of mist that break
Upon a lurid and terrible lake,
Where all is so hideously weird and still,
That the boldest heart grows faint and chill,
Where a lethal calm pervadeth the air,
That no mortal soul hath felt elsewhere,
Where the sense of existence seems to cease,
On to this mere with its mask of peace,
That seldom man sees and yet survives,
The shattered bark in anguish drives.

Speechless, the bravest, now pallid grown,
Looks at his messmate turned to stone,

Then by the fiendish glamour won
On the appalling phenomenon
Gazes, knowing life's sands are run.
For this is the dungeon of torture where
The Typhoon strangles its prey, and there
Illumined by neither the sun or moon,
But by the cloud-shapes that festoon
The storm's dark walls, the mariner views
Gigantic bands of varied hues;
And as he gazes with straining eyes
At this strange wonder of the skies,
To his amazement they resolve
Into crazed sea-fowls that revolve
In this inferno of the winds.
Snatched from the bosom of the deep, all kinds
Of birds in this gyrating cage
Struggle against the tempest's rage,
Whose ever-narrowing sable ring,
Not even the albatross's wing,
Speeding with swift and piercing flight,
Shall battle through; and now they light
Upon the vessel's outstretched arms,
In innumerable swarms,
A silent aviary she floats,
For not a sound from the myriad throats,

Is heard above the burning wave,
Nothing save the far-off rave
Of winds delving the seaman's grave.

Once more the boatswain's whistle rings,
And the voice of resolution flings
Its orders right and left:—the tars
Aroused, lash quickly the broken spars,
And stretch the canvas till they form
An anchor 'gainst the returning storm,
Forward and aft the yards are braced,
The broken stays and blocks replaced,
And the ship hove-to, with stem full on
To the very point whence the wind hath gone;
Then they lash the rudder fast, and wait
In strange and various moods their Fate.
Some idly pace the decks, a stricken crew,
Others in anxious gathering groups; a few
Brave hearts, unconsciously return
To former duties—at the stern,
Grasping the useless tiller, stands
The helmsman waiting for commands
That ne'er shall come. All in despair
At the narrowing horizon stare
Knowing that Death is ambushed there!

Suddenly from the wall of doom
Like a spectre gliding from a tomb,
A monster galleon sweeps in view
Of the desperate, grim, and despairing crew,
Such as their eyes have never seen,
Such as for centuries hath never been.
With all sails drawing full and free
Her huge form drives through the stagnant sea
With incredible speed. A moment past
And no hull was seen, now it loometh vast
And dark, save where the breath of the main
Hath hidden her bows 'neath its crystal stain;
And through her sails, by our Lady of Grace!
The blood-red rays of the storm clouds race,
As darts the last flare of an autumn sun
Through the evening mists when its course is run.
Nearer and nearer the strange ship comes,
With a wailing sound that chills and numbs
The stoutest heart, now her forecastle deck
And poop can be seen from the sinking wreck.
But no human being is visible there
Yet, in the ghastly, unearthly glare,
Hell's fiendish pastimes all eyes ensnare.
To the splintered bulwarks the sailors crowd,
Or clamber up an unbroken shroud,

While in their throats the welcoming cheer
Is strangled at birth by a nameless fear.
High on the poop by the mizzen chains,
Entranced by the wail of his wild refrains,
A cross-legged skeleton, grinning, guides
The vessel's course through the motionless tides,
And ever above the riotous din,
That wells from the waist of this ship of sin
He plays his one stringed violin.
Facing this spectre a woman sits,
Enthroned on the capstan 'tween the bits,
And round and round her revellers surge
Dancing and chanting the seaman's dirge.
Her lips are as crimson as gore fresh strewn,
Her breasts are as white as the wintry moon,
Her tresses are dark as the vulture's wing,
She is a ghastly, beautiful thing.
From her eyes ablaze with accursed desires
Flash forkèd tongues of lurid fires,
And she drinks from a flaming crystal cup
The warm blood of life that bubbles up.

Now the ships are abreast, and the eye can see
Through the massive hull quite easily,
And there where the lights of St. Elmo burn

Her hold is thronged, from stem to stern,
With every form of godless mirth
Known to the daughters, and sons of earth.
Down the smooth main-deck that never rolls,
With human skulls they play at bowls,
On their wrists are the marks of the felon's gyves,
And they gamble for naught but human lives.
Here a group of wantons whisper low
Plotting a pure soul's overthrow;
Here they mock The Christ on bended knee,
With ribald jests of blasphemy;
Here the crimes of the world in sequence pass,
As flitting shades in a looking-glass,
And the shuddering soul of each sailor hath seen
What his actions were, or might have been!
With horror o'erwrought at this vision of sin,
The bravest have loaded a culverin,
And now with a roar through the startled air
Canister, grape and chain-shot tear
Full at life's foes, but no ship is there!
Like a mirage has vanished her gruesome form,
And in its wake strides on the storm.

.....

As when the winds in some profound ravine
Give battle for the kingdoms of the air,
And in a furious whirlwind intertwine
Their giant energies in death's despair,
So to this vortex of the deep converge
The storm's wild hosts. Now the masts from the decks
 of oak
Are torn, and hurled like feathers in the seething surge;
The barque and all therein, at one fell stroke,
Are overwhelmed. The typhoon's deed is past revoke.

And when, from out a cloudless heaven, eve's star
Shall shine upon the tranquil deep again,
No sign of this fierce tragedy shall mar
The beauty of the slumbering wave; all pain,
All tears, all human anguish shall have gone
To their eternal rest, deep deep within
The fathomless ocean of oblivion.
The only vestige of life's mystery of sin
Shall be the passing shadow of the shark's dark fin.

A LOVER'S QUESTION

SUMMER sunlight in the swift stream gleaming,
Balmy breath of honey-scented bloom or bee,
Everything with living beauty dowered
Brings one image back to me.

As the hunted stag pants for the covert,
As the torrent yearns for the boundless main,
As sighs the bud for the dew's sweet shower,
So my love of thine is fain.

Yet I wonder if the flower's passion
Yieldeth aught of pain or pleasure to the dew?
Doth the ocean heed the wooing river?
Am I anything to you?

FATE

GOD hath a silent missionary
Whose name is Fate,
Upon the scaffold of transition
Hard by the gate
Of perfect knowledge, he is standing
Early and late.

He seeth not his helpless victim
For he is blind,
He heareth not the cry of anguish
That rends mankind,
God's voice alone his ear discerneth.
Borne on the wind.

When yet the stars in heaven unnumbered
Were veiled to sight,

As his Creator willed, asunder
 He cleft the night,
The Day dividing from the Darkness,
 And Wrong from Right.

Blind with the glory of life's dawning,
 Insane with pride,
To the assembled hosts of heaven
 His spirit cried,
"None can conceive a world of sorrows
 Where joys abide."

Fallen from heaven for denying
 His Master's sway,
Robed as an executioner,
 He must obey
God's voice, that bids him lay in ruins
 These walls of clay.

Ascending his relentless scaffold,
 Mankind must go,
Like a long line of ants that labour
 Swiftly or slow,
Uncertain when from out the shadow
 Descends the blow.

Yet let the heart of man take courage,
 For, as he bares
His throat to Fate's dread falchion,
 His Lord prepares
A crown for him who with another
 Life's burden shares.

A DREAM

I dreamt that a vision
Sat weaving in state
By the moon's silvery guidance
The web of my fate.

The colours she handled
Were ashen and gray,
And the broken woof clouded
My heart with dismay.

I dreamt that thy spirit
Swept into the room,
With raven locks streaming
Sat down to the loom;

From those dark silken tresses
One thread quickly drew,
And faster, still faster
The swift shuttle flew.

On the warp of my future
One word thou didst write,
Then, quitting the settle,
Didst vanish from sight.

Lo! the woof's threads were whole,
And the word woven there,
Dimmed the mellow moon-tide
When Night's bosom lies bare.

Over fate's dark horizon
Its promise shines now,
Like the Star in the East
Upon Bethlehem's brow.

THE RECUSANT

I met a knight
In vesture white,
Singing for joy in the dear sunlight,
His face and form were fair to see,
And he did carol merrily
Of bud and blossom, beast and bird,
And their delight in God's sweet word,
Till all who heard his gracious lay
With sorrow saw him ride away,
And smiled no more till vesper's chimes
Recalled the spirit of his rhymes.

This warrior blest,
As knightly crest
Displayed a star on his mailed breast,
And round its rays as motto ran,
The name of her whose love made man
Of his frail soul, and bade it be
True to its high nobility,

That bade it learn the hymn of peace
Rising each morn from Earth's increase,
Assured of its eternal share
In the life that burgeons everywhere.

Blythe and gay
On charger gray

This knight drew rein, ere close of day,
By sudden anxious doubts beset,
Where four cross-roads in a meadow met.
The first led straight to a murky town,
The next stretched over a barren down,
While the last meandered pleasingly
As far as the eye of man could see,
Till it lost itself in a forest dim;
This chose the knight—now pray for him!

I met a dame,
And whence she came
I may not whisper, nor her name,
Though both were traced on her jewelled stole,
In the guise of a mystic aureole.
Her locks were as dark as the storm-cloud's fold,
That over the seaman's corse hath rolled,

Her breasts of snow the soul enchained,
Her lips with the blood of life were stained.
Urging her steed, she galloped fast
Down the self-same road the knight had passed.

I met a knight
A gruesome sight,
Riding so still in the wild moonlight.
His breast-plate wore no more its star,
And in its place was a ghastly scar
Whose blue lips seared by a sea of flames
Were damascened with hideous names,
His face was ashen gray, and oh!
The grief therein may no man know,
No words of mine or others tell,
For it was the face of an infidel!

HERE AND HEREAFTER

LIVE, love, and suffer,
Suffer, and love, and endure,
This is the daily labour,
That keepeth the heart-springs pure.

Live, love, and endeavour,
Endeavour, and love, and weep,
For the heart that knows no sorrow,
In the tomb shall know no sleep.

THE DANCE OF DEATH

THE sun hath gone, and the moon hath fled,
Hushed is the town with its living dead,
The wind, as it journeys with sigh and groan,
Meets never a creature in flesh and bone.

Above on a rocky mount, supreme,
A castle stands, from whose turrets gleam
Fierce rays, that soon in the circling gloom
Grow pale as tapers within a tomb.

What are these forms that, fast and slow,
Surge through the hall, like mists that blow
O'er some lonely mere when the elves entune
Their hymns of fear to the hornèd moon?

They dance to the measure wild and weird,
That is heard when the winds all day have veered
Through the forest aisles, and the withered leaves
Whisper that Death is binding his sheaves.

Here lurid torches flicker and flare,
Casting their splendour of despair
O'er the livid face of each ghostly mime
Spinning like sand in the glass of Time.

Up the frozen walls the torchlight steals,
Till it reaches the arches, and there reveals,
That all this revel of frenzied mirth,
To a heart-shaped viol owes its birth.

Through the wide spread void of the central dome
It seems like a bird of prey to roam,
Guarded by brazen fiends that lean
From the architraves o'er the glittering scene.

From the spectral fiddle ebb and flow
Harsh strains at the touch of an unseen bow,
Striving in vain to tell the sin
Of the tortured spirit chained therein.

Each note, as it throbs through the tremulous air,
Doth change to a colour rich and rare,
And weaves as an arras round the room
The shadowy dancers' death and doom.

Here fares the king whose throne of fear
Was a noble nation's ghastly bier;
Here flaunts the queen whose jewelled stole
Was wrung from pauper's hoarded dole.

Here the veilless nun and her lover dance
To the shuddering tune's mad dissonance,
Here figures of Eld whose glances appal,
Are keeping their souls' high carnival.

Here, false to his knightly investiture,
The templar whirls with his paramour,
And by his side with withered bays
The bard who sold his art for praise.

Here trips the bride with heart unwed,
Here speeds the priest with mass unsaid,
Here masquerades each earth-born soul
That prayed the tomb might be its goal.

Onward—onward the swift time flows,
While louder—louder the revelry grows;
When hark! A gleaming purple stain
Pierces the air with its murderous strain.

'Tis the selfsame note that Hell intones,
When from a thousand flaming thrones,
She hails the rebel heart of him
Who mocked the praise of seraphim.

As the turbulent torrent's voice hath died,
And its heaving breast sunk petrified,
Suddenly, bound in the blizzard's thrall:
So the revels cease in the haunted hall.

Down, down to the depths where the real soul lies,
Stares each dancer aghast! in his partner's eyes,
What his gaze finds there no other hath known—
The soul he beholds is his very own.

The chain of the gate on the causeway clangs,
The hound in the courtyard bares his fangs,
And moans at a being, to man unseen,
Who enters the hall with majestic mien.

Straight to the fairest of shades he glides,
And claims her as one of his many brides;
While the gleaming torches wane and die,
With the wailing viol's expiring sigh.

Arm under arm with their shadows they stride
Down the perilous path of the mountain side,
Led by Death with his eyes of fire,
Lighting the way to their souls' desire.

Through the silent streets of the town they stream,
Like gruesome thoughts in a hideous dream,
Till the skeleton host through the lych-gate pours
As the storm-foam sweeps o'er sad seashores.

Deep, deep for their shadows fresh graves they delve,
As the monster bell of Remorse tolls twelve:
They are gone! like wraiths in the dawn's white breath,
To dance, yet again, their Dance of Death.

QUESTIONINGS: MIND AND HEART

BENEATH a spreading beech I sit and gaze

These autumn days,

At green and brown, and brown and green,

At gold and russet boughs that lean

Towards me, while far up between

The leaves I spy

The changeless sky,

Pure as the thoughts of Easter morn,

Bright as the thoughts of life new born,

Crowning this witness of decay

With a momentary ray

Of hope; how slender you may guess,

When I confess

That at this very instant flew

Dark wings between me and the blue.

You laugh, brave heart, and say a rook

Swept by on high,

And that its shadow I mistook.

May-be you're right,
And that my sight
For earthly things has grown so blurred,
So shortened by hope long deferred,
By staring at the nameless dread that flings
Its vague, unanswerable questionings
O'er our most cherished festivals,
Till they become our funerals,
That I see gray where you see green,
See what to you is all unseen;
If so, small wonder my reply
Is but a sigh:
Which seeth well, we cannot tell,
Is't you or I?

What's that you say, brave heart? This way
A spirit flew
Far up above, and west-ward drew,
With white wings spread
Above my head,
To where the golden gates of Hope,
For-ever ope
Their arms to all who seek for light?
May be, but to my sight,
A white-winged swan in level flight

Sped onward, till within the arms, at last,
Of yonder sun it passed,
Behind whose shining gates
Dark night awaits
Assuredly,
Both you and me.
If so, small wonder my reply
Is but a sigh.
Which can the best unwind,
The heart or mind,
This tangled web of Fate,
Seeming so intricate?
Who seeth true what o'er us flew?
Is't I, or you?

LOVE'S REFUGE

THERE was a tree, and there was a flower,
On a moorland, side by side they grew,
And the dawn's bright breath, and eve's dewy shower
Through their drooping leaflets, tenderly blew.

For a cavernous wound had torn asunder
The gnarled giant's sun-burnt breast,
And the tiny bloom some unseen wonder
Had cast where no blossoms were manifest.

Day after day in the summer weather,
The languorous, lilting, golden thieves.
Searching for sweets in the purple heather,
Whispered of lands where the earth conceives

Her garden of flame, and life is flooded
With rapturous, limitless joys unquaffed,
Where her breasts of slumber with buds are studded
Like the burning gems in youth's rosy draught,

And the lonely blossom languished, grieving
For these fairy pastures and singing strands,
Where her happier sisters of light were weaving
Earth's bridal robes with loving hands.

Through the lonely hours of night-tide dreaming,
Life's shadows, deepened a thousand-fold,
And she prayed in the rays of the red sun gleaming
Her glorious sisterhood to behold.

Yet at last when the spirits of light, ascending,
Spread their pinions of splendour with rustling sighs,
And the stricken form of the tree unbending
Stood grim and gaunt 'gainst the burnished skies.

A speechless pity, from the heart-springs welling,
Suffused with love the floweret's soul,
And all the alluring dreams repelling,
With her tendrils she circled the broken bole.

Day after day her steep way wending,
Nigher each eve to Love's goal she crept,
Till as auburn-crowned autumn's brief reign was ending
In the heart of the oak the blossom slept.

That night the lords of the storm assembled
Their hosts, and disputed the welkin's throne,
And the gardens of flame on the morn resembled
A waste of foam o'er the salt seas blown.

Yet the gentle bloom in the rift abiding,
Had heard unmoved Death's trumpet blare,
And the rugged giant, the gale deriding,
Knew that Mercy's embrace can slay Despair.

SCENES FROM THE BISHOP OF ANGOSTURA

ACT THE SECOND

SCENE I.

Palace of the Governor of Angostura. Loggia surrounding the courtyard in the centre of which a fountain is seen half hidden by tropical plants. Here and there stone seats and easy chairs. Doors at the back and sides leading to the Governor's apartments, entrance-hall and council chamber respectively. A large closed gateway at the back of the courtyard leads to the public square. Before noon—Springtime—
 DON MIGUEL the Governor and DON ALFONSO the Bishop of Angostura enter from the back. They are both of advanced age.

GOVERNOR

(standing in the loggia and looking towards the garden).

Another cloudless day, the limes will soon
 Be ripe and ready for the sickly souls
 Aboard the yearly galleon.

BISHOP.

Pray to God
 That they observe the calendar of Saints,
 And fall not into England's greedy maw.

GOVERNOR.

Was it for not observing holy days
That such misfortune overtook thyself?

BISHOP

(pretending not to have heard him).

Thy major-domo would address thee.

GOVERNOR.

Ah!

Good Pedro, what dost thou require of us?

PEDRO.

To know, Your Excellency, if the players,
Who leave for Old Guiana, may depart
With the convoy.

GOVERNOR.

First their faces we must see.

Bid one and all attend on us anon.

(Exit PEDRO by centre.)

BISHOP.

They need protection 'gainst the Indians,
And one might add, the buccaneers.

GOVERNOR.

Too true!

Of late our coasts and estuaries are filled
With them.

BISHOP.

They are the very sons
Of Belial, these ungodly souls, who yield to none
Allegiance, save perhaps to him who rules
A regicide o'er modern Babylon.

(They seat themselves.)

GOVERNOR.

Their manners I dislike as much as thou;
Still, as a soldier, I can not withhold
My admiration for their wondrous pluck,
And self-reliance, which achieves so much
With what we would deem all inadequate
For such extreme and hazardous exploits.
Moreover, those who dwell at Angostura
Must hold themselves their debtors in one point.

BISHOP.

How so?

M*

GOVERNOR.

Their capture of Jamaica's strand
Allowed our Bishop to return to those
Who had not yet recovered from the loss
Of his well merited preferment.

BISHOP (*greatly mollified*).

Nay!

Thy words, indeed, are far too generous,
'Tis I who am indebted to this chance—
I mean Our Lord's inscrutable decrees—
Which brought me back unto my former flock.
That Providence should choose such instruments
Is passing strange! They even carried off
The chalice I intended to present
To his Eminence the Cardinal! I wish
I had the villains here; I'd make them all
True Catholics, or else prepare them well
For their deserts, before I sent them back
Unto their only friend, the devil.

GOVERNOR.

Come!

There must be some gold blades of corn amid
The tares. What of Sir Francis who did risk

His life for my Elvira when she fell
Among his ruthless buccaneers? Methinks
He practised what some others only preach.

BISHOP.

Thy generosity doth blind thine eyes.
Miguel, beneath his simple talk there lies
A deep dyed villainy, whose crooked ends
Reach even to Jamaica.

GOVERNOR.

Dost thou mean
That he would seek to lead the English here?

BISHOP.

Surely his wondrous kindness to thy niece
Is but a skilful way of gaining leave
To enter freely here, and spy out all
Our weakest points.

GOVERNOR.

Alfonso, dost believe
There ne'er was such a man as Don Quixote?
Remember seekers, for the Eldorado
Cannot well choose their fellow-travellers.

Thou art mistaken, be assured, if not
Why did he quarrel with his men?

BISHOP.

Upon
The understanding that they should straightway
Fall in again, did they fall out.

GOVERNOR.

I'll risk
My sanity that he did pawn his life
To save Elvira from his cut-throat crew.

BISHOP.

I never shall believe that other hands
Than those of her (*uncovering*) most blessed patron Saint
Had ought to do with thy fair child's return.

GOVERNOR.

A pleasing version of a simple tale
Which will bring grist into the Church's mill.

BISHOP.

Alas! Thy grey hairs have not brought thee grace;
Always the same unreasoning want of faith
In the higher teachings of the Holy See.

One virtue which does cover many sins
Is ever thine. If other men possessed
Thy charity combined with zealous love
For all the revelations of the Church,
My rightful occupation would be gone.

GOVERNOR.

Thou art the same as when we studied law
At Salamanca, ere thou hadst enriched
The Church with thy vast zeal and erudition:
A dose of bitters first, and then a sweet
To take the acid from the patient's mouth.

BISHOP.

Thou dost malign me.

*(He rises to leave. The GOVERNOR accompanies
him to the door.)*

GOVERNOR.

Never in my heart,
But more of this on thy return anon.
Forget not that at noon thou art my guest.

BISHOP.

Fear not I will be selfish and return.

(Exit BISHOP towards the square.)

GOVERNOR (*alone*).

I wonder why two men, so far apart,
So oft at variance in the things that seem
Most vital in this world of ours, should grow
Thus helpful and devoted to each other?
'Tis all beyond the puny brain of man
To probe the meaning of the universe;
One thing is clear and can an anchor prove,
When blinding waves of ignorance here strive
To wreck our minds upon the sands of doubt,
The duty of the hour, cost what it may!
To deal with present wants is mine. No man's
To arraign the future at the bar of Time.

SCENE II.

(*Enter DONA ELVIRA from the left.*)

DONA ELVIRA.

A happy morrow, father.

GOVERNOR.

Ah! my child,
How was it that thou camest not before,

To cheer thy uncle at his weary task
Of mending all the broken nets of those
Who fish for fortune in this town of ours?

DONA ELVIRA.

I heard another's voice with thine, and feared
To enter lest I should intrude. Someone
Has troubled thee?

GOVERNOR.

Nay, nay—our bishop came
Whose smile recalls the heyday of my life,
When in my active frame the fire of youth
Ran fast and furious through my veins, and all
My moods allegiance owed to fancy's clown.

DONA ELVIRA.

I cannot think that one whose words are prized
By all, could have found pleasure but in jests.

GOVERNOR.

I look not like it, child, but then I laughed
A laugh for every sigh that now is mine,
And cracked my merry jokes, and quirked my quibbles
With the men who'd seen and talked with those who made
The wit of Spain the marvel of the wise.

Great Lope and the marvellous Cervantes,
And other giants of Titanic mould,
Dwarfed only by the Olympian twain. Yes, men
Who oft had grasped the hands of those who fought
And died, bequeathing to their fair Castile
The fairest dower she has ever had—
A Spaniard's peerless name against the world!
'Tis ever age's privilege to scorn
Or minimise the work of younger hands,
Still, Holland and fair Portugal are blots,
That stamp this generation far beneath
Their fathers'.

DONA ELVIRA.

Yet, my Lord, the Bishop says
That men are more obedient to the love,
And counsel of the holy mother Church.

GOVERNOR (*excitedly*).

Tut! Tut! 'tis so unto the outward eye,
But human hearts remain the same, and though
The iron heel of Inquisition may
Grind into dust the liberty of thought,
The breath of life shall waft it o'er the world,
And sow it broad-cast in the soul of man.

DONA ELVIRA.

Thy words do frighten me, they are so strange!

GOVERNOR.

My child, dismiss these idle ravings of
An o'erstrung heart. I only meant that Spain
Is but the shadow of her former self.

*(MARIA is seen with her apron full of flowers
crossing the courtyard. DONA ELVIRA, seeing
her, jumps up, exclaiming.)*

DONA ELVIRA.

Ah! there's Maria with her apron full
Of flowers. I must help her to adorn
The panelled room for our expected guests.

*(At this moment a knock is heard at the door—
DONA ELVIRA stops to see who it is.)*

GOVERNOR.

Come in.

SERVANT.

Your Excellency, Don Francisco seeks
Your presence.

GOVERNOR.

He is free to enter here.

*(ELVIRA on hearing the name of Sir Francis
hesitates.)*

DONA ELVIRA.

Maria can arrange the flowers quite
As well without me.

GOVERNOR.

I must differ, niece.
There is another harmony whene'er
Thy pretty fingers touch the coloured notes.
Go, child, when the players come I'll send for thee.

(ELVIRA joins MARIA.)

GOVERNOR *(alone)*.

Fool that I was to give such food to babes.

*(Gazing fondly after DONA ELVIRA and MARIA
who leave laughing by the door on the left.)*

That selfsame picture I have seen before!
But for Maria's silver hair I'd think
Elvira was her mother, and that we
Were still in Seville twenty years ago,
When the yellow jerkins made all Europe cringe
To the slightest whim of Spain; today she dares
To wrestle with us for the new world's crown!

*(He remains for a moment engrossed in thought
and then says:)*

Ah me! how all is changed, the very globe
Itself has like man's fortune waxed and waned,

For nought's at rest within the universe;
Each man, each plant, each stone is changing form,
Each sun, each star, each moon is somewhat else
Than what it was—than what it was before,
This thought flashed through my puny brain and made
The pendulum of action seem at rest,
So great its sweep, so small our span of sight.

SCENE III.

(Enter SIR FRANCIS PENROSE by the door on the right.)

(The GOVERNOR rising and greeting SIR FRANCIS.)

GOVERNOR.

Most welcome! I'm delighted you have come
Betimes, that so we can discuss your plans
At leisure. I have written the Governor
Of Carracas, an old and valued friend,
That you will be his guest, until a ship
Bound for Jamaica can be found.

SIR FRANCIS.

I am

Your Excellency's debtor till the sands
Of fleeting time have run their utmost grain.

GOVERNOR.

Nay, nay, my niece and I have not repaid
Our debt to thee.

(Enter PEDRO from the back of the Courtyard.)

PEDRO.

Your Excellency, the players
Upon your wishes wait.

GOVERNOR.

Bid them advance,
Then tell her Ladyship that they are come.

(Exit PEDRO at back.)

(Turning to SIR FRANCIS.)

These mummers ask if I will let them join
The convoy starting from our town today.

(Laughing.)

I bade them here attend that we might judge
If they were worthy of your company.

SIR FRANCIS.

I doubt me not, if they were asked, they'd say
I added little to their merriment,
And that 'twas I who was most honoured.

SCENE IV.

(The PLAYERS troop in by the gate at the back of the courtyard, bowing as they pass.)

GOVERNOR.

Well,

If I am judge of faces, they are Moors,
And Romans every one. Shall we not bid
Them sing a snatch? Their songs are oftentimes
The best thing in their motley bill of fare,

(Meanwhile DONA ELVIRA enters from left.)

SIR FRANCIS *(rising and bowings low)*.

My Lady, pray accept my humble duty.

(SIR FRANCIS and DONA ELVIRA shake hands.

DONA ELVIRA seats herself next to the GOVERNOR, a little distance from SIR FRANCIS.)

SIR FRANCIS *(seating himself)*.

To her Ladyship I leave the choice.

DONA ELVIRA.

And she

In turn doth leave it to her uncle.

GOVERNOR.

As

Behoves a niece who is most dutiful.

Good Pedro, tell them we would gladly hear
Some ancient ballad they are wont to sing
When, mid their weary wanderings they collect
Around the cheerful blaze of forest boughs,
The evening meal once ended, and recall
The former glory of their race. We want
No travesty of Lope in its place.

(PEDRO now approaches the PLAYERS and communicates the Governor's wishes to them. An animated discussion ensues among them while the tuning of their various instruments is heard. Much hesitation is however evinced and it would seem as if they could not decide upon a suitable song, when a powerfully built MOOR, with a determined face, pushing back those who would detain him, steps forward and accompanying himself with a zither, sings:

Within the west gleaming,
Vast cloudlands are streaming
Across the sun's face at the close of the day,
Now vistas concealing,
Now dreamlands revealing,
But never the palm-groves of Morgan le Fay.

The daylight that dallies
Above the dark valleys,

Ne'er falls on cuirass, or on two-handed sword,
The wind as it hovers
Round whispering covers,
Floats never a banner above the green sward.

Yet scimitars glimmer,
And coats of mail shimmer,
Resplendent the host of Mahomet appears,
Like forest flames leaping,
The sun's rays are sweeping
Adown the long line of the Saracen spears.

From out the dusk stealing,
The bugle is pealing
Like the voice that shall summon our souls to embark,
When beside the weird river
Of Eblis we shiver,
On hearing the lap of faint oars in the dark.

Midst the stars in their glory,
The sickle-moon, hoary
With ruin, glides up to acclaim the brief sway
Of the spirits that muster,
Beneath her chill lustre,
Majestic and grim in their ghostly array.

As the mountain-flood forges
All a-foam through the gorges,
Then leaps to the mere and for ever is still,
So this army of lancers,
The wild bugle answers,
Sweeping down from the crest of Alhambra's proud hill.

(PEDRO, who has gradually become more and more impatient, now makes a sign as if he would silence the singer. The GOVERNOR, however, by a gesture bids him not to interfere, and the singer disregarding the increasing anxiety of his fellow-players, continues.

Whence came then their dower
Of triumph and power?
What meant then their rule o'er the land of the Cross?
These turbaned invaders,
Who braved the Crusaders,
Was their sway then as nothing, a gain or a loss?

Through Dawn's deathless portals
Swept the Moorish immortals
To chasten the earth with the scourge and the rod,
At Faith's fountain nourished,
They conquered and flourished,
For the sons of the Crescent were true sons of God.

(The singer finishes amid the suppressed murmurs of remonstrance and applause of his fellow-players. PEDRO can with difficulty restrain his anger. The GOVERNOR claps his hands loudly.)

GOVERNOR.

A song which sings the praise of noble men
Is ever worthy of applause; but when
It proves how great was our own Cid Bivar,
Then doubly precious is it to our ear.
We grant your wish, and thank you for the song.

(The PLAYERS, bowing low, leave the way they came.)

PEDRO.

The permit of the players is not signed
Your Excellency, shall I fetch it from
Your study?

GOVERNOR.

Nay, I must go there myself
For other documents. Elvira come
And tell me when our welcome guests arrive.
Sir Francis my apologies for thus
Deserting you for the weighty cares of state.

(Exeunt GOVERNOR and PEDRO to left.)

N*

SIR FRANCIS.

I hardly can believe I go today.

DONA ELVIRA.

It seems but yesterday we met.

SIR FRANCIS.

And yet

'Tis months ago, for we did wander far,
Not having either guide of compass mid
The myriad of wonders that abide
In the great primeval forest.

DONA ELVIRA.

Ah! how strange,

How beautiful it was.

SIR FRANCIS.

It always seemed

As though each opening in the glade would lead
Us to a grassy stage from which would roll
The curtain of the forest, suddenly,
And reveal Manoa shining in the sun.

DONA ELVIRA.

Oft didst thou tell me of that wondrous town,
Till I too felt we were within the charm

Of a magic circle where we were permitted
For a moment to intrude.

SIR FRANCIS.

Gladly I'd spend
My life thus searching for the city, where
The noble Incas are supposed to drink,
From Ponce de Leon's enchanted spring,
The secrets of eternal youth and love.

DONA ELVIRA.

And willingly I'd wander by thy side,

(Hastily.)

That I might see these people—Dost recall
How through the creepers beauteous birds did flit
From branch to branch approaching, yet each time
A little nearer, till they seemed almost
To touch us in their wayward flight.

SIR FRANCIS.

Yes, oft

The toucan with its gorgeous wings has brushed
Close by me, often has some unknown bird
Perched on a bough and told in warbling notes
The odyssey of man, who seeks for joy
Where it is not, and wanders from the goal,

Which in the open arms of nature lies
Inviting his return unto his home.

DONA ELVIRA.

To me each living creature seemed to speak.

SIR FRANCIS.

How sweet was then the call to prayer, when first
The muffled organ notes of nature fell
Upon the ear, borne on the gentle breeze
That told the coming of the orb of day,
And rising in a solemn chant of praise
Swept all the forest aisles with living tones,
Which grew in volume and in depth as each
Progressive chord with eager joy took up
A fuller harmony, until from out
The leafy boughs the heav'nly songsters burst
With hearts and throats pulsating to the beat
Of earth's majestic morning hymn, and choired
The diapason of their thanks aloft,
Till it was lost amid the boundless sky—
The dome of nature's universal church.
How still and peaceful all the world at noon,
When every sound was hushed and by a stream
We sat and watched the humming-birds as they.
Dipped tiny beaks within a crystal bath.

DONA ELVIRA.

'Twas by the side of such a stream that first
I saw the purpose of this life, and grasped
Its spiritual meaning which can lead
The mind aloft unto the helpful stars.

SIR FRANCIS.

Where deep celestial harmonies we hear,
Which can alone be scored upon the heart
When we transpose them in unselfish acts
Upon the keyboard of this life.

DONA ELVIRA.

Those were
Most happy days.

SIR FRANCIS.

How gladly I would live
Them o'er . . . and o'er . . . (*he hesitates*).

DONA ELVIRA.

But to behold these marvels?

SIR FRANCIS.

Indeed for them alone; for I have learnt
That these Utopias which I sought so far
Afield are but a symbol of the mind,
And that the spirit which presided o'er

This commonwealth of gracious innocence
Stood by my side unnoticed. I was blind

(drawing nearer to DONA ELVIRA)

I see it now, alas too late. *(He again hesitates.)*

DONA ELVIRA.

Be sure

It was thy guardian angel, oft she comes,
The bishop says, in these disguises.

SIR FRANCIS *(aside)*.

Ah!

She's but a child, and understands me not.

(aloud.)

Little dost thou know, how much my life
Hath need of her sweet ministry and guidance.

DONA ELVIRA.

I never shall believe, señor, thy life
Other than what I found it in our trials.

SIR FRANCIS.

'Tis hard to ask thee to remove a fair
And pleasing portrait of myself, and put
A scarred and ugly one within its place,
Yet 'tis my duty and I prize thy heart
Too much to let an untruth linger there.

DONA ELVIRA.

Not even for thy sake can I do this.

SIR FRANCIS.

This favour as his last Sir Francis asks,
And in exchange for his diminished self
Begs thou wilt grant to him a tiny gage,
Some trifling thing, that he may round it twine
The clinging tendrils of sweet memories.

DONA ELVIRA (*greatly agitated*).

What would you? I have nought. Here is a cross

(SIR FRANCIS *takes the cross*)

My patron saint has blessed and may it keep

(*Knocking is heard at the gate of the courtyard.*)

Ah! our guests arrive! Fare thee well . . . I'll pray
For thee

SIR FRANCIS.

Then fare thee well, I'll wear thy smile
Of innocence for ever in my heart.

(*He takes DONA ELVIRA's hand and kisses it;
then slowly draws her towards him and em-
braces her.*)

Have I won what I must not, dare not claim?
Elvira dost thou love me?

DONA ELVIRA.

Since we met.

SIR FRANCIS.

Thy innocence is more than I can lose!

DONA ELVIRA.

Was thy departure but a pretext, love,
To steal my secret from me?

SIR FRANCIS.

Nay . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . it is
A sacred resolution to protect
Thy holiness from the upas blight that falls
On everything around me.

DONA ELVIRA.

Dost thou mean
Thou still wilt go?

SIR FRANCIS.

To save thee from a fate
More cruel, love. Thy destiny I ne'er
May link with mine—a gambler's cast at dice!
Ah! little, little, dost thou dream what life
Has held, and still may have in future store
For me; a gypsy of the sea, whose barque
From out a blinding tempest in distress,
Drove, to thy island paradise, and there
Hath lingered in a deep lagoon of peace,

Till, from the overhanging shore, the blooms
Have crept, and hidden with their loveliness
The stains and scars of warring winds and waves.

DONA ELVIRA

(burying her face in her hands).

Why didst thou bid me waken from my dream?

SIR FRANCIS.

To dream, beloved, no more! My good resolves
Are put to flight—. *(He kisses ELVIRA.)*

DONA ELVIRA *(freeing herself).*

The Bishop comes!

(Exit DONA ELVIRA hurriedly to left.)

SIR FRANCIS.

Was man
Ever so torn as I, twixt love and duty?

SCENE V.

(The BISHOP and DON RODRIGO enter from the left.)

DON RODRIGO *(in a whisper to the BISHOP).*

It seems we are not wanted here my Lord!

(To SIR FRANCIS.)

Good morrow Don Francisco.

(They shake hands and seat themselves.)

Canst thou tell

Where we shall find our gallant Governor?

SIR FRANCIS.

He's gone to sign a permit for the players.

BISHOP.

Oh! we can wait.

DON RODRIGO.

Meanwhile we can enjoy

Your conversation which we hear will soon

Be lost to us.

BISHOP.

It seems you leave today.

SIR FRANCIS.

Yes, with the convoy for Guiana.

DON RODRIGO

(turning to the BISHOP).

Then

Your Lordship's coadjutor is the person

Who can assist him most.

(To SIR FRANCIS.)

He made last year
The compromise which freed his Lordship, thus
He's well-acquainted with your countrymen.
He'll be delighted if you'll but accept
His hospitality.

SIR FRANCIS

(addressing the BISHOP as well as DON RODRIGO).

You are most kind,
But Don Miguel bids me stay with his friend
The Governor.

DON RODRIGO.

Nay, he can ill attend
Your needs. His Lordship's representative
Is freer and more able to devote
His time to those whom fortune has deserted.

SIR FRANCIS.

Sirs, this and other favours I've received
While here, have made me now and evermore
A debtor unto Spain, which I'll repay
In full if fortune puts it in my way.

DON RODRIGO *(aside)*.

Mark what a deep-dyed villainy is here!

BISHOP.

I thank you, yet do pray, as well I may
With patriotic zeal, that Spain may not
Need help from anyone.

SIR FRANCIS.

A gallant wish.

SCENE VI.

(Enter the GOVERNOR from the right followed by a MULETEER in picturesque costume.)

GOVERNOR *(to the BISHOP)*.

Forgiveness for my tardiness.

(to SIR FRANCIS).

Señor

The muleteer Diedo seeks your ear
Ere he shall load your sumpter mule.

SIR FRANCIS.

'Tis well.

(SIR FRANCIS and DIEGO leave by the gateway leading to the public square.)

BISHOP.

Your friend and I conversed about his journey.

GOVERNOR.

Indeed!

DON RODRIGO.

He's kindly said he will accept
The holy coadjutor's residence
At Old Guiana as his own.

GOVERNOR (*with decision*).

Señor,

I have prepared my colleague for his coming,
Nay, this will never do, he must go there.

DON RODRIGO.

But why? he'll surely be best off with those
Who can devote more time to his desires?

BISHOP.

Why hinder us in doing what we deem
Conducive to his good?

DON RODRIGO.

The holy Church
Finds her chief ornament in lending aid
To those who are in need.

GOVERNOR

(turning fiercely on DON RODRIGO).

Captain, methinks

Sincerity is man's chief ornament.

BISHOP *(excitedly)*.

What mean you by these words?

GOVERNOR.

I mean... what's this?

(A great noise is heard without. Shouts and the sound of an approaching multitude.)

DON RODRIGO.

A tumult!

BISHOP.

Revolution sure it is!

SCENE VII.

(DON ALVAR, DON ESTEBAN, enter followed by the town-counsellors of Angostura, soldiers, populace etc. from the gate of the courtyard leading to the public square.)

DON ALVAR.

Don Esteban Morales seeks for leave
That he may lay a tale of wondrous woe
Before the Council.

GOVERNOR.

Let him speak.

DON ESTEBAN.

I bear

The news that Old Guiana has been sacked
By Carey and his cut throat buccaneers.
A desperate resistance we did make
Until the palizadas were on fire
And all the terraplens sank in the ditch,
When we were forced to sue for terms. Alas!
He now doth hold the town and all therein,
Our worthy padre and the holy nuns,

(The BISHOP wrings his hands)

To ransom: swearing he will make the sights
At Texel—when returned the silver fleet
Back from the Spanish main—a paltry joke,
To what he will inaugurate amid
Our blazing houses, if he is not paid
For every dram of powder he has fired,
A piece of eight,—in other words the sum
Of twenty thousand, nothing less, and all
The buccaneers we hold as prisoners.

GOVERNOR.

This is disastrous news in conscience!

DON ESTEBAN.

Aye

He is the last man to forego his word.

BISHOP.

The Lord have mercy on my hapless flock!

GOVERNOR (*to* DON ESTEBAN).

Why went you not to Moriquito first?

It must have taken many days to reach us.

DON ESTEBAN.

'Twas sacked Your Excellency weeks ago,
Its convents and its churches are in ashes.

BISHOP.

Oh! that I should have lived to see this day.

GOVERNOR.

Fear not, thy coadjutor's life is safe.

BISHOP.

How so? what dost thou mean? Did I not hear
Aright?

GOVERNOR.

Are we not fortunate enough
To hold Sir Francis Penrose in exchange?

DON RODRIGO (*aside*).

This is a dish cooked by the devil!

BISHOP.

Ah!....

(SIR FRANCIS *enters from the square.*)

DON ESTEBAN.

We knew Your Excellency was about
To send a convoy to our town and felt,
That while we told you of our pressing wants,
We would in turn be saving your rich goods
By giving timely warning.

GOVERNOR.

Our best thanks
Señor. We'll send at once the wherewithal
To save your town from this appalling fate....
For one, I am inclined to send a force
Which shall pay ransom with high interest
In lead.

(*Addressing DON ESTEBAN and the town counsellors.*)

Let us unto the Council hall,
And there determine how we may redeem
This dire catastrophe.

O*

(Turning to the populace.)

Brave citizens

Who will not straightway up, and aid a friend
In need, must ne'er expect a hand
To pluck him from adversity's abyss.
Who will not plant his courage as a shield,
And bulwark 'gainst the onslaught of misfortune,
May ne'er expect his children's laugh to cheer
The eventide of life. First fell Guiana,
Then Moriquito—next 'tis wel Yet ere
The blow, while still these buccaneers are gorged
To somnolence with booty, our Toledos
I'd drive home to their hilts. Now is our time,
As one man let us sally from the gate
And win back what is ours, and other spoils
Besides. A pleasant sound 'twill be to hear
The tinkle of the mule-bells as they chime
Merrily across the lanos till they reach
The plaza, and there slip their weighty loads
Of rich doubloons. Choose out a goodly troop
Of sturdy, valiant volunteers to swell
The trained-bands who in turn shall aid the troops;
Meanwhile, within the council hall, we'll search,
And find the road to victory. Be sure
The honour of fair Spain shall be upheld.

ALL.

Long live our gallant governor!

GOVERNOR

(turning to DON RODRIGO and pointing to SIR FRANCIS).

Henceforth

Each hair on this man's head is worth a life,

His value is so great, within your care

I leave him. Caballeros come this way!

(Exeunt GOVERNOR, DON ESTEBAN, and the Town COUNSELLORS towards the council chamber. DON ALVAR, DON CARLOS, and the BISHOP who have accompanied the GOVERNOR halt in conversation beneath the loggia. Meanwhile DON RODRIGO and SIR FRANCIS with a portion of the populace exeunt towards the square, leaving a group of citizens and beggars behind.)

FIRST CITIZEN.

I hear the mule-bells already!

FIRST BEGGAR *(with one leg)*.

Yes, and the merry making at the tavern!

SECOND CITIZEN.

What a night 'twill-be!

FIRST CITIZEN.

I'm off to volunteer!

FIRST BEGGAR.

How good the wine will taste when paid for by these rogues' debloons!

SECOND BEGGAR (*with one arm*).

Ye stand a better chance to taste a yard of steel at their expense.

FIRST BEGGAR.

How so?

SECOND BEGGAR.

Though thy spirit be in flight, yet must thy body bide their onset, and they give no quarter.

FIRST BEGGAR (*loftily*).

A caballero of my standing may not soil his honour by a duel even in words with such as thou!

FIRST CITIZEN.

No quarter? This puts a different complexion on the matter.

SECOND BEGGAR.

And a different taste in the flagon?

FIRST CITIZEN.

Some sturdy hearts must man the walls; they cannot be left unguarded. I'm for that duty.

FIRST BEGGAR.

And I likewise.

SECOND BEGGAR.

Sorry the day that leaves such an one as thee to guard anything that is not thine own already!

(The bells of the Cathedral peal joyously for the service.)

FIRST BEGGAR.

A man who has already given proof of doughty deeds — a true hidalgo like myself, who's paid his debt to Spain upon the gory battlefield must needs let such base curs as thou snarl at his boot-heels. No more! I must be off else shall I lose my seat beside the Cathedral door, and my draught of sack to-night at the tavern.

(Exit FIRST BEGGAR towards square.)

SECOND BEGGAR *(calling after him)*.

O'ertaken by the Orinoco's floods in a drunken sleep beside the wharves in winter time, thy leg was food for crocodiles! *(To the citizens.)* He never wore a yellow jerkin in his life—unless he stole it. Though he make haste, I can give him half the square, and yet be at the church door first; but there my fortune ends, for his wooden peg plays sign-post to his misfortunes, while I must needs

point out my loss with a hand of health that halves
the dole!

FIRST CITIZEN.

Hark they're cheering in the square. Let's hasten there.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Come, let's be off!

(Exeunt FIRST and SECOND CITIZENS and SECOND BEGGAR with the remainder of the populace towards the square, as they leave the BISHOP, DON ALVAR, and DON CARLOS approach in conversation.)

BISHOP.

A thought has crossed my mind; the galleon's due,
She must pass by Guiana and be seized.
We are undone!

DON ALVAR.

Your Lordship's mind can rest.
Don Esteban assured me he had thought
Of this, and had sent messengers to warn
Them not to try and pass except at night.

BISHOP.

The extent of this misfortune takes my breath
Away!

DON ALVAR.

Let's pray the council acts with zeal
And wisdom.

DON CARLOS.

There is little chance of that!

BISHOP.

How so?

DON CARLOS.

They will expend the precious time
In plans and counterplans, the product of
The crazy brain of Don Miguel. Now need
We action linked with craft, our only hope
Is to join forces with the Indians.

DON RODRIGO (*who has returned alone*).

Yes

Therein lies our salvation.

DON ALVAR.

Without doubt!

BISHOP.

What has become of Don Francisco?

DON RODRIGO.

Oh!

We chanced upon the guard outside the gate,
By now he's safely in the gaol. (*They all laugh.*)

DON CARLOS.

Bravo!

You've done Don Miguel's bidding to the letter.

DON RODRIGO (*to the BISHOP*).

My Lord, I fear we never shall induce
Our Governor to ask for Indian aid.

BISHOP.

How so?

DON RODRIGO.

Their evil passion once aroused
He fears that none can stem, and they will turn
And rend us. Speaking plainly he denies
All that the missionaries have achieved.

(*turning to the BISHOP.*)

Your Lordship's influence upon the converts
He counts for nought.

BISHOP.

He surely would not go

So far?

DON RODRIGO.

Yes, as the Indian converts passed
Last week the Duomo, I am sure I heard
Him mutter "Pagan still at heart".

BISHOP.

If so

He's more unfriendly to our holy work
Than I had thought.

DON RODRIGO.

If he had but his way

I do believe that he would leave the nuns
Unto their fate.

BISHOP.

Impossible!

DON RODRIGO.

Alas!

'Tis all too true. Great Charity doth blind
Your Lordship's eyes, else why did he refuse
To send his niece to our dear convent.

BISHOP.

Nay,

He has the Church's cause much more at heart
Than you suppose.

DON RODRIGO.

I'll warrant he will send

Her aid when 'tis too late.

BISHOP.

The Lord forbid!
There must be some plan surely which will bend
Him to our righteous views.

DON RODRIGO.

A plan there is,
But it needs a courage equal to the cause
Which is at stake.

(Turning to the BISHOP.)

Your Lordship has but to say
The word, and all are saved! The fate of these
Poor innocents henceforth is in your hands,
Refuse it and we may as well await,
Unmindful of the pricks of righteous conscience —
What may befall.

BISHOP.

I understand you not?

DON RODRIGO.

Remove the heretic.

(DON ALVAR gives a sign of approbation.)

BISHOP.

The heretic?

DON RODRIGO.

The same our Governor! Here must we choose
Between our friendship and our faith.

BISHOP (*with dignity*).

If this

Knot were the only one we had to cut
Our duty would be clear; but as it is,
Although alas! his conversation seems
At times to warrant your stern accusation,
I believe 'tis often only for the sake
Of stirring up an argument.

DON RODRIGO.

I wish

I could think as your Lordship does.

DON ALVAR (*to DON RODRIGO*).

Señor,

Acquaint us with your clever plan in full.

DON RODRIGO.

Pay first the ransom and release our friends,
Then rouse the Indians, and let them surprise
These buccaneers in ambush; when they both
Are weakened by the strife 'twill be our turn
To fall upon them and regain our own.

DON ALVAR.

Timely and sage advice!

DON RODRIGO.

Don Esteban

Comes from the Council, let us hear his views.

*(DON ESTEBAN enters; as he does an outburst
of applause is heard from within the council
chamber.)*

DON ESTEBAN.

Sirs, I can bear no more, our Governor
Has taken leave of all his wits, and raves
Of bygone days, of former heroes, aye
Of the Cid himself, declaring we are all
Unworthy our ancestors since we
Refuse to place our heads in the lion's maw,
And what is worse his frenzy's wondrous catching,
And the other caballeros swept along
By the tidal wave of his great eloquence
Are all but won.

DON RODRIGO.

If so our cause is lost.

*(DON CARLOS makes a sign to DON RODRIGO
and enters the council chamber.)*

BISHOP.

You see Don Miguel does not stand alone.
Many agree with him.

DON ESTEBAN.

Some men of straw
Led by his fiery words to think themselves
Most valiant souls, all equal to such rash
Endeavours.

DON RODRIGO.

Once Don Miguel's gone they'll shake
At the sounds of their own voices, but till then
They have their votes, and rule the council.

DON ESTEBAN.

Is lost, I fear.

All

BISHOP.

Is there indeed no hope
Our soldiers may prevail?

DON ESTEBAN.

If you but knew
Their numbers, and had seen them pike in hand
Swarm up the glacis and charge madly through
The deep embrasures, where the guns belched forth

A storm of billets to eternity,
You would not ask me this.

(DON RODRIGO *seats himself at DON MIGUEL'S
writing table and writes.*)

BISHOP.

What shall we do?

DON ESTEBAN.

No easy question that!

BISHOP.

Whence find a means
To save my precious flock?

DON RODRIGO (*from the table where he is writing*).

Each angry word
Of exhortation from this madman lights
A torch to flame the fagots for the priests
And holy nuns.

BISHOP.

He must not be allowed
To ruin all.

DON RODRIGO.

His imbecility
And our supineness are indeed well-matched,
Else had we done our duty long ago.

BISHOP.

He must be thwarted; that is evident; —
But how? but how? There lies the difficulty,
He, in his quality of Governor
Commands the soldiers and can work his will.

*(DON RODRIGO meanwhile has risen from the
table and has shown to DON ESTEBAN and
DON ALVAR what he has written, which
evidently meets with their approval.)*

DON RODRIGO.

While he remains our Governor!

DON ALVAR.

Quite so.

DON ESTEBAN.

Until he is removed.

BISHOP.

Removed?

DON RODRIGO *(approaching the BISHOP)*.

For thwarting
The highest interests of the Church; but sign
This paper, *(DON RODRIGO hands the parchment to the BISHOP.)*
And I'll answer for the rest.

BISHOP (*glancing at the document*).

You would denounce him to the Inquisition?
You ask me to destroy my friend? Never!

DON RODRIGO.

Heaven forbid that I should counsel that!
Nay, nay. 'Tis but a form.

DON ESTEBAN.

An empty form
To gain a righteous end.

DON RODRIGO.

Our object won,
This paper I will burn with my own hands.

DON ALVAR.

'Tis not a real imprisonment.

DON ESTEBAN.

'Tis but
A brief, a momentary discipline.

DON RODRIGO.

It is our only chance; we are between
The hammer and the anvil.

BISHOP (*hesitating*).

Must it be? (*to DON RODRIGO.*)

If I do sign, Señors, you will not use it
Till I have done my utmost to persuade him?

DON RODRIGO.

We'll wait your bidding.

DON ESTEBAN.

More he cannot say.

BISHOP.

And it shall be destroyed hereafter?

DON RODRIGO.

Yes,

I will return the warrant to your Lordship,
That it may be reduced to ashes.

DON ALVAR.

Hark!

Another outburst of insane applause.

DON RODRIGO.

We are too late, the holy nuns are lost.

*(The BISHOP hurriedly signs and gives the
paper to DON RODRIGO, and then enters the
Council Chamber followed by DON ESTEBAN.)*

DON RODRIGO (*rolling up the paper carefully*).

This is the handle of the axe which shall
Hew down this withered semblance of a tree.

(*Turning to DON ALVAR.*)

Fly hence and bring the soldiers from the fort
They will not hesitate to do my will.
Guard every exit, and when thou dost see
Me draw this paper, let them all invade
The Council Chamber and remove this dolt.

(DON RODRIGO *enters the council chamber.* DON
ALVAR *leaves by the gateway at the back.*)

SCENE VIII.

(*The Council Chamber of Angostura, DON MIGUEL is standing at the head of a long table, strewn with charts, around which are seated or standing the various members of the Council. The hall is lofty and behind the Governor's chair the royal arms and standard of Spain are displayed. Large oriel window at the back overlooking the Orinoco. As the curtain rises a prolonged outburst of applause is heard.*)

DON LOPE.

Bravo!

GOVERNOR.

Then are we almost of one mind.
Believe me, caballeros, it is not
My halting words, but that undaunted blood
Of fair Castile which mindful of the deeds,
The glorious deeds of your proud ancestors —
Whose pride meant but the conquest of the globe —
Knocks loudly at the portals of your hearts
And bids them scorn these timid counsels.

DON LOPE.

Our Governor is right, we were and are
The victors of the world.

DON FERNANDO.

The bluest blood
The earth has seen.

DON ANTONIO.

This, time alone will show.

DON LOPE.

What mean you? (*aside to DON FERNANDO.*)

He's no better than a Moor
Or worse, for they at least are brave!

DON FERNANDO.

With such
A leader, one would storm a precipice!

DON LOPE.

I'd follow him through molten lava!

DON ANTONIO.

Stay —
We know not yet what we will do.

DON LOPE

(aside to DON FERNANDO).

Mark that!...
What did I say?

DON FERNANDO.

The craven-hearted cur!

GOVERNOR

*(who has been looking among the maps with
which the table is strewn, selecting one).*

Here is the map whereon our route is shown.
I know that, in so grave a situation,
It is but natural that every one
Should not agree:—but that some should advise

A caution treading on the skirts of fear,
Is most deplorable.

DON LOPE.

Well said!

DON FERNANDO.

Well said!

BISHOP.

Herein he goes too far!

DON RODRIGO

(aside to the BISHOP).

Come, this must end.

There's a limit to our patience.

*(He is about to rise: the BISHOP however,
placing his hand upon his arm prevents him
and rises in his stead.)*

BISHOP.

Señors,

Since so much is at stake, I ask my friend
If he is bent on risking all, upon
A single cast, to leave no stone unturned
That we may win, and therefore to invite
The Indians to assist us in our need.

GOVERNOR.

These gallant caballeros know my views.
I have not changed my mind since I refused
To show our weakness to an enemy.

DON RODRIGO.

Without their artful aid our cause is lost.

GOVERNOR.

Yes, if we deem ourselves already beaten.

DON RODRIGO.

This lot is ours if we attack these fiends
Without allies.

GOVERNOR.

That I should live to hear
Such craven words, from one who calls himself
A soldier!

DON RODRIGO (*rising furiously*).

Dotage which alone attests,

(*placing his hand upon his sword and advancing
towards the GOVERNOR.*)

Your right to govern here, alone prevents
My proving that, if I at times can play
With words, I have some learning too with this!

(*DON RODRIGO draws his sword.*)

GOVERNOR

(draws likewise and advances to meet him).

Though not as young as when I heard it said,
A Spaniard should beware of words, and trust
In deeds, I still am at your service.

BISHOP *(rushing between them).*

What?

Have we then not sufficient warfare on
Our hands, that we must quarrel 'mongst ourselves?

(turning to the GOVERNOR.)

Miguel, fast friends we've been these fifty years,
And side by side, or boldly face to face,
Have fought for what we felt to be our duty.
Have I once asked a favour of thee? No!
So much thou canst not say, and yet today
Before these caballeros I entreat
Thee, pause, ere thou dost bring the hideous fate
Of Old Guiana on this town.

GOVERNOR *(turning to Counsellors).*

Señors,

Do these faint words find echo in your hearts?
Myself I doubt not you'll prefer to drive
These pirates, empty handed, whence they came,

To tamely paying all the gold and silver
Their bottomless cupidity demands.

DON RODRIGO

(aside to the BISHOP).

We are undone! Your Lordship may I speak?

BISHOP

(to the GOVERNOR).

Once more I do entreat thee not to rush
Headlong upon thy fate.

GOVERNOR *(irresolute).*

Alfonso, I....

I cannot play a coward's part.

*(DON RODRIGO draws out the warrant from
his doublet.)*

DON RODRIGO *(aside to the BISHOP).*

May I?

BISHOP *(aside).*

There's nothing left— alas! alas! I must!

(He bows his head in acquiescence.)

*(DON RODRIGO steps behind DON MIGUEL, and
holds the parchment roll so that it is visible
to DON ALVAR who is standing in the half
opened doorway.)*

GOVERNOR

*(who has noticed nothing, approaches the BISHOP
and taking him by the arm leads him apart.
Meanwhile the SOLDIERS silently enter the
room.)*

No ill thou'lt bear me if I placed before
Our friendship my allegiance to the State?
Within thy heart of hearts thou dost forgive;
Nay more, dost feel, that I have done my duty;
Only this sacred word can bridge the gulf
My actions seem to delve. Could I agree
With thee and not be false to all I prize?
Believe me, for thy sake I will forget
The hasty words Rodrigo said.

(turning towards DON RODRIGO).

What's this?

The fortress guards within the Council Chamber?

(to the GUARDS.)

Who dared to move ye from the castle walls?

DON RODRIGO.

Don Miguel de Cazares, former Lord
Of Monterez, and Governor till now.....

GOVERNOR *(interrupting him).*

Till now?....

DON RODRIGO.

Of Angostura, thou art here
Denounced as recusant and heretic
Unto the Inquisition. (*turning to the SOLDIERS.*)
Lead him hence!

GOVERNOR.

Denounced as recusant and heretic?
(*he draws his sword.*)
Let him advance who dares believe it true!
(*The SOLDIERS hesitate.*)

DON LOPE.

He challenges, it seems, the Inquisition!

DON FERNANDO.

Yes, here he goes too far.

DON ANTONIO.

Not if he knows
He is unjustly charged.

GOVERNOR (*breathing hard*).

I am denounced
To the Inquisition? Nay, it cannot be.
Show me the deed of accusation. No?
Then read the name of him who signed the charge.

DON RODRIGO.

Alfonso de Nogueira.

GOVERNOR.

'Tis a lie!

DON RODRIGO

(showing him the paper).

Read for thyself!

GOVERNOR

(throwing down his sword).

Lead me where'er ye will:

This world has nought more terrible in store!

(The GOVERNOR is surrounded by the SOLDIERS and carried off a prisoner. As he is leaving the hall the BISHOP makes a step towards him as though he would interfere, then hesitates and remains motionless in the centre of the stage gazing wistfully after the GOVERNOR.)

SCENE IX.

DON LOPE.

Mark! when he knew who had subscribed the deed,
He bowed in acquiescence.

DON ANTONIO.

Nay, his words
Did not mean this. Don Miguel is accused
Unfairly. I for one repudiate
This act. Let us protest!

DON FERNANDO.

If we complain,
They'll think us heretics as well.

DON LOPE.

That's so.

DON ANTONIO.

What's this? a moment gone ye were disposed
To follow him to the Inferno.

DON LOPE.

Ah!

But then he was our Governor.

DON FERNANDO.

We're still
His friends, and hope he may be pardoned soon.
To question, though, this sentence would be rash.

DON LOPE.

Untimely.

DON FERNANDO.

And might be misunderstood,
By the Inquisitors.

DON RODRIGO (*addressing the COUNSELLORS*).

Let us proceed,
Unmindful of the trying incidents
At which our patriotism has, alas!
Obliged us to assist. With your consent
I do propose that I shall seek at once
Assistance from the neighbouring Indian chiefs,
And that this very day a convoy start
With gold enough to ransom everyone.

DON ESTEBAN.

I second this.

(*All the COUNSELLORS hold up their hands.*)

DON RODRIGO.

It is agreed by all.

BISHOP.

My coadjutor and the nuns are safe!

(*The boom of a distant cannon is heard. Every-
one rises hurriedly and hastens to the oriel
window overlooking the Orinoco.*)

BISHOP.

The Saints be praised; it is the galleon!

DON ESTEBAN.

Yes,

The flag of Spain is there, then all is well.

DON RODRIGO.

It must be so, for she has passed the fort.

DON FERNANDO.

How bravely she bears on towards the quay.

DON LOPE.

Our goods are safe...are safe...

DON FERNANDO.

I have a store

Of hides and tallow to exchange.

DON LOPE.

I've dyes

Worth all their weight in gold.

DON FERNANDO.

Let's go on board...

(They walk aside conversing.)

BISHOP.

She shortens sail, she'll soon be at the wharf.

DON RODRIGO.

She'd better have a care, she steers at large,
Her pilot does not seem to know his course.
'Tis strange there are so few men on her decks.

DON ESTEBAN.

They're down below, they'll soon appear. Yes, see
Here up they come in swarms.

DON RODRIGO.

What's this? they run
Her cannon out — my God!...the buccaneers!
(The booming of cannon is heard.)

DON FERNANDO

(who has hurriedly broken off his conversation with DON LOPE).

What can it mean?

BISHOP *(wildly)*.

It is the horse of Troy!

DON LOPE.

The Lord have mercy on our souls!

DON RODRIGO (*aside*).

The man
Who tries to save these cowards will obtain
A coffin for his pains.

(*Aloud.*)

Now, need we more
Than ever Indian aid. Before all else
This duty do I place.

(*Exit DON RODRIGO hurriedly to left.*)

(*A scene of the wildest confusion now ensues.*)

DON LOPE.

Let's to the ramparts!

DON CARLOS.

This way unto the fort!

DON LOPE.

Too late!... too late!

DON FERNANDO.

Await them here!

DON ESTEBAN.

We have more chance upon
The hill.

DON FERNANDO.

Within the square!

DON LOPE.

Within the woods!

DON ESTEBAN.

No! let us barricade the doors!

DON FERNANDO.

No! No!

This way.

BISHOP.

I'll hasten to the church and hide

The plate.

DON LOPE.

If Don Miguel were only here!

(The doors of the Council Chamber now burst open, and a mob of terrified women and children rush in appealing for succour. Many kneeling entreat the BISHOP to save them. The curtain falls rapidly on a scene of the wildest confusion, wherein the central figure of the BISHOP alone remains calm and unmoved.)

THE WANDERING JEW

'TIS a night of death,
The weir-wolf's wail
Is heard on the breath
Of the rising gale.

Of the stars no trace,
Yet the marsh-flame clear
Burns on the face
Of the stagnant meer.

Through the haunted woods
The owl's hoot rings,
Close nestle the broods
'Neath their mother's wings.

Down the gloomy ride,
A swift tread passed,
Or was it the stride
Of the tempest's blast?

To the castle's moat,
On, on it goes,
In a phantom boat
That no one rows,

A dark form sweeps
To where a door
Frowns from the keep's
Rock-girdled shore.

In the baron's hall
The last ember dies;
In her troubled sleep
My lady cries,

Perchance at the flight
Of ghostly feet?
Or was it the sight
Of her winding sheet?

Deep bays the hound,
But not at the clock,
Nor the sentinel's round;
An unearthly knock

At the lich-gate calls,
It opens wide —
Yet no drawbridge falls
O'er the moat's deep tide.

On the spiral stair
A step is heard,
With a sigh of despair
My lady stirred!

Without noise or jar,
From its socket leaps
Each bolt and bar;
The arras sweeps

O'er the threshold's stone,
With its silken fringe;
Without sigh or groan
Each massive hinge

Turns, and a guest
Creeps swiftly in;
O'er his bearded breast
Gleam eyes of sin.

With a weary sigh,
He draws a chair
To the hearth, while high
The wild winds blare.

"Oh! crime, sweet crime,—"
He singeth low,—
*"Who shall thy kingdom
Owerthrow?"*

*"Oh! love, sweet love
Of Self, shall e'er
Thy golden fleece
Of witchery cease
The human heart to snare?"*

Hark! was it a tap
On the window pane?
Or only the rap
Of the driving rain?

Yet hark! again!
O'er the tempest's din,
Like one that fain
Would enter in.

My lady wakes
With a shuddering start;
With palsy quakes
Her broken heart.

The casement's clasps
A gust hath burst.
My lady gasps!
A form accursed

To her bedside comes;
She fain would rise,
But the past benumbs,
And petrifies.

Fair is his face,
Yet a sword-thrust mars
Its youthful grace,—
Not gained in wars!

He counts each sob
Of my lady's heart,
With lips that throb
Like a burning dart.

O'er the tempest fell,
From the chapel rolls
The midnight bell
Calling the souls

To peace and prayer,
And grief's surcease;
From sin's deep snare
Granting release.

The hearth-logs flare
Through the circling gloom,
But their red eyes glare
At an empty room!

Through the stormy skies
Drives the hornèd moon,
My lady lies
In an icy swoon!

Once more the hound
Bays long and loud,
Then slinks to ground,
With spirit cowed.

Once more the skiff
With its ghostly charge,
From the castle's cliff,
Seeks the grassy marge.

Through the glade once more,
The fleet feet pass,
By a humble door
They halt alas!

The rusty latch
From its fastening flew,
'Neath the rotting thatch
Stands the wandering Jew!

On a pallet of straw,
Lies a man of peace,
Who listens with awe
At the gale's increase.

The hermit's beads
Are in his hand,
But his past misdeeds
The hour command.

He fain would pray,
But the dead sins rise,
At the quickening gaze
Of the Wanderer's eyes.

Long, long is the strife
Of the stricken soul,
Ere the former life
Hath ta'en its tole.

The hermit's head
In prayer is bent,
The past has fled
On its dark intent.

Out, out in the night,
Midst the mad uproar,
Speeds its gruesome flight
From door to door.

At memory's call
The Wandering Jew,
He cometh to all,
Aye to me and to you.

SORROW

SORROW! when human joys most perfect seem,
Thou glidest, midst the pageant of life's dream,
With trailing purple robes, and ashen mien,
Suddenly, from the infinite unseen.
From 'neath thy tangled tresses, bound with thorns,
Pierces the arrow of a glance, that mourns
Tearless, our pray'rs—as gently by the hand,
Obedient to Another's wise command,
From the sunny rose-strewn garden of our play,
Thou leadest, one by one, our joys away.
Yet when thy chastening voice and hand have fled,
The heart still treasures what thy lips have said,
For in its mystic notes the ear perceives
The sobbing breath of one whose bosom heaves,
And hears Christ's tears, Who with our anguish grieves.

SPRING'S MESSAGE

SPRING with all her happy train
Of laughing nymphs and dancing fawns,
Heedless of chill April's dawns,
To our hearts has come again!
To our frozen, thirsty lip
Lo! her shining emerald cup
In her rosy hands she holdeth up,
And she bids our spirits sip
Ecstacies, that were but dreams,
In the moon's white wintry beams.
While a draught her lips distil,
Whence the senses drink their fill,
Of the hope that Life redeems
 Of its gladness,
 Of Love's madness,
That we may her smile remember
 When in sadness
By the ruddy, glowing ember

Of some dark and drear November,
The well-filled flagon stands unquaffed,
 And our only pleasure
 Is the treasure
Of a day when once we laughed!

That we may her smile recall
When the blinding snowflakes fall,
On the hillside, on the plain,
On the troubled heart and brain.
When the mind in sorrow ponders
On the marvellous unseen,
When the weary spirit wanders,
Through the pitiless "hath been".
Through its cloisters, sad and lonely,
Where the echoing footsteps only
Of the fleeing past is heard,
Growing faint and fainter ever,
Hinting of reunion never,
Making all our being shiver,
Every nerve and fibre quiver,
Sick with hope deferred.

Then to thee Oh! Spring we'll offer,
Heedless of each hollow scoffer,—

When the nights are long and dreary,
When the heart is faint and weary—
A libation, overflowing,
Wreathed with holly leaves and berries
Which bright fancy, as ripe cherries,
Shall display,—in beauty growing,
By young Pan on tip-toe cloven
In thy scented tresses woven.
Each fair fruit a charm discovers
To the gaze of sighing lovers,
Beckoning from their leafy bowers,
Sweet with fleeting, fairy hours.

Now the wine-cup's magic, leapeth
Brainward, and thy pageant sweepeth
To some sylvan dell of slumbers,
Where, to Pan's soft reedy numbers,
Every wish in bliss is buried,
And the weary heart is ferried
To the Islands of Desire,
Where Life's miseries expire,
And each sense and passion reels,
'Neath thy long remembered kisses.
Where the soul at last dismisses
Life's enigmas, Life's ordeals!

Thus to thee Joy lifts her beaker,
Though each year her praise is weaker,
As our faculties grow number,
While our tribulations strengthen,
As the shadows slowly lengthen
On Life's worn and stained dial.
In the garden of our summer,
Fruit and flower are falling, falling,
To our spirits calling, calling,
While each withered leaflet sighing,
Wails a farewell to the dying.
Yet our footsteps to thine altar
Never linger, never falter,
Till from out the gloomy portal
Hung with hopes and prayers immortal,
Sounds the summons from Death's viol.
Till that moment, when his measure
Life's vibrating chord of pleasure
Cleaves, and like a crystal shower
Breaks this goblet 'neath his power,
Till that dread yet glorious hour,
Spring, my spirit drinks to Thee!

Even till that august instant
Be it eons, eons distant,

When amid the growth and waning
Of a wider march of seasons,
Where the flame of high endeavour
Shall burn clearer, fuller ever,
Where the mind shall weigh the reasons
Of this life—to truth attaining,
Grasping Grievs sublimest meaning;—
When the soul in silence leaning
From the citadel of heaven,
Widely gazing star-ward under
Shall behold this world of wonder,
As God's word hath willed it even,—
Midst the planets faintly glimmering,
In the nether darkness shimmering,
Like a votive taper lighted
At a wayside shrine of faith,
For the pilgrim soul benighted
On the giant bridge of Death.
Till that moment when the spirit
Crowned with splendours yet to be,
Shall its destiny inherit,
Deathless Spring, it drinks to Thee!

THE BURDEN OF THE WATERS

TINY dewdrop gliding earthward,
In and out from thorn to thorn,
From thy rose-leaf cradle shaken
By the first faint breath of morn;

Like a rainbow, for an instant
Glistening on the tangled grass,
Trembling in the breeze, unwilling
In the underworld to pass;

Onward thence where few would follow,
Singing through the realms of shade,
Like a holy palmer chanting,
Through a dark and ghostly glade;

Till some font of hidden waters
Bids thy carols cease in prayer,
By thy faith to life returning,
From the caverns of despair.

Babbling brooklet! welling ever
From thy spring amid the ferns,
In whose smile the sun is mirrored,
• For whose kiss all nature yearns;

Rippling through the reeds and rushes,
Past the warbler's sedgy nest,
Leaping up to greet the lily
As it slumbers on thy breast;

Day by day thy voice sings softly
Love-songs in the blue-bell's ear,
Till thy silver arrow quivers
In the bosom of the mere.

Headlong torrent from the mountain,
Dashing down through rocky gorge
Over shallows, over boulders,
Past the smithy's gleaming forge;

Now thy breakers roar and answer
To the hammer's ringing blows,
Now the eddies flash and sparkle
As the firelight comes and goes;

Eagerly thy voice proclaimeth
Ardour's infinite reward,
Till within the mountain beaker
All thy wealth of strength hath poured.

Silent river! flowing ever
With a current deep and still,
Formed from out the sweet communion
Of the torrent and the rill;

Now thy waters leap the mill-dam,
Speed the tireless wheels that grind
Nature's golden meed of harvest,
For the uses of mankind;

Every day some thriving city
Owes to thee its throne of trade,
Every day sees man's inventions
Crowned triumphant by thy aid;

Every day thy help increases
As thy waters onward sweep,
Till thy mute lips break their silence
At the welcome of the deep.

Boundless ocean swaying ever
At the bidding of the moon,
In whose glittering Nirvana
Dew, and rill, and river swoon;

On whose sparkling surfs and billows
Float the laden ships of Peace,
At their heads the lights of Progress,
In their arms the earth's increase.

Surging ocean, rolling onward,
At the storm-wind's shrill behest,
Till thy arms the globe encircle,
Never weary, nor at rest;

Till the allotted task accomplished,
And the bidden labour done,
All thy soul as incense rises
At the altars of the sun,—

Rises in a golden vapour
Heavenward, then falls again,
As the longed-for scud or shower
On the parched and arid plain.

In a dewy benediction
Sinking when the day is o'er,
Gliding from the rose to mingle
With the ocean's waves once more.

In a never-ending circle,
Half of light, and half of shade,
Mystic symbol of the union
Of all things that God hath made.

Light and shadow — faith and labour —
Like a halo life enfold,
That the soul thus crowned hereafter
God's own Presence may behold.

EPILOGUE

AT times
I have found a solace in my rhymes,
And thought they rang with happy chimes:
 Another moment, stung
By their defects, have well-nigh flung
 Them in the flames,
 Seeing too well
 How far they fell
 Beneath my aims.
 And yet again
 I have been fain
To hope that what I have so faintly traced,
Someone with fairer talents graced
 May yet rejoice,
 With sweeter voice,
 To sing anew
When the swift rush of swallow's wing,
Announcing all the joys of spring

To man, shall make the flowers wave
Upon my grave.
That some poetic god,
Flying hereafter where I trod
Wearily amid life's throng,
May spy my tiny blossom in the grass,
Where Death turned down his empty glass,
And bending pluck the same, and weave,
What he who sowed could ne'er achieve,
A starry-voiced imperishable song.

THE END



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